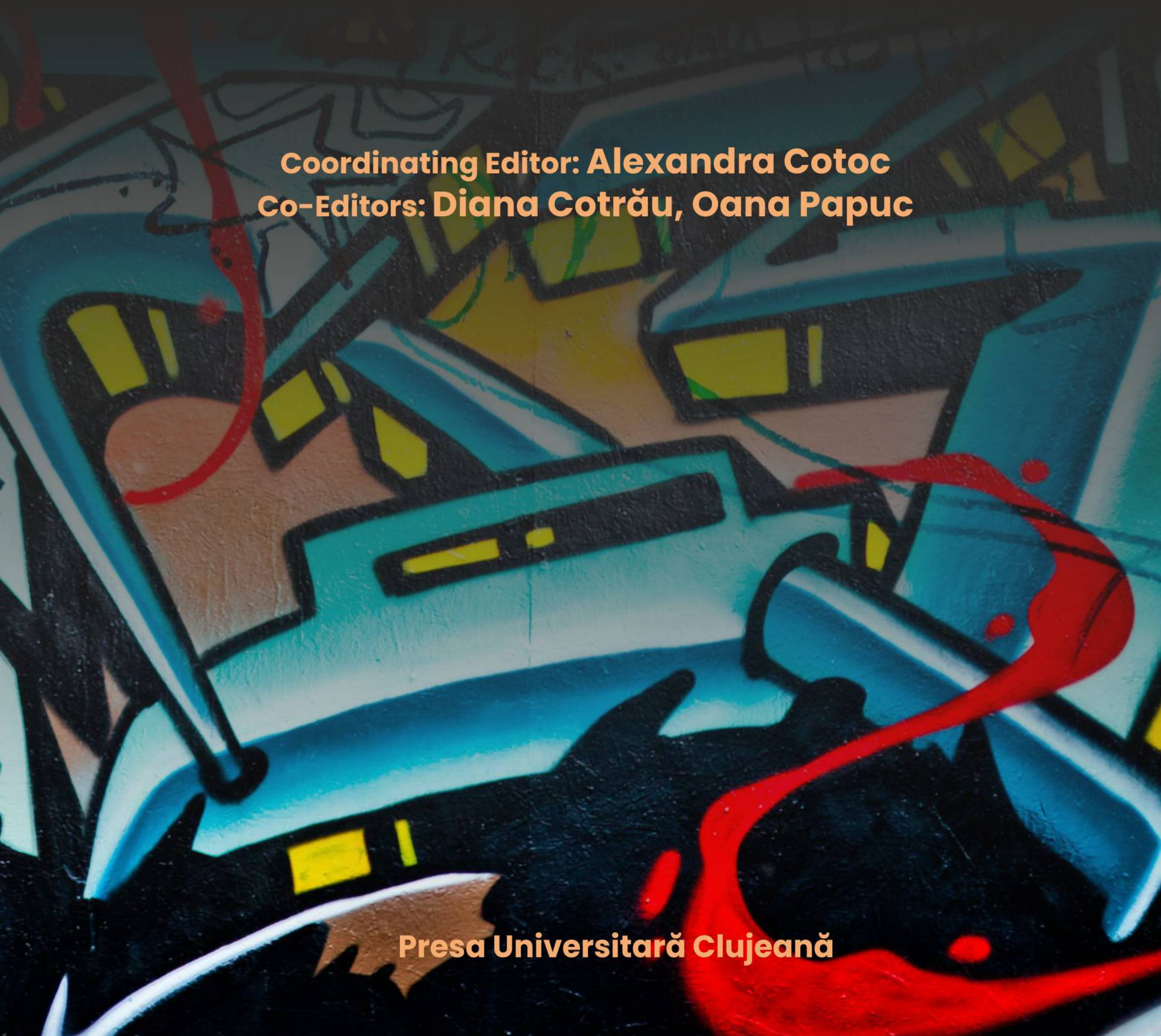
HOW YOUTH CULTURE ARTICULATES

A Languaculture Incursion into Subcultural Youth Assemblages



Coordinating Editor: Alexandra Cotoc
Co-Editors: Diana Coträu, Oana Papuc

Presa Universitară Clujeană

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Publicarea acestui volum a fost finanțată
prin Fondul de Dezvoltare al Universității Babeș-Bolyai 2020
(SEED Grant 2023-2024)

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PRESA UNIVERSITARĂ CLUJEANĂ

2024

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ISBN 978-606-37-2275-2

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Foreword

The present volume is a continuation of a, so far, two-part collaborative work rallying the contributions of both senior and junior researchers. Our avowed scientific interest in language, young people, and culture has proven to be a generous and accruing incentive for setting ambitious publishing goals. Indeed, as an editorial triad, we have remained loyal to what we consider an ever-giving subject affording a variable ratio between the three constituents. Thus, if the first volume in the series – An Introduction to Internet Linguistics. The Cultural Sociolinguistic Take with Case Studies – published in 2021, zoomed into how prevalently young sociocultural identities are communicated and negotiated in online environments through discourse, the present volume furthers the research and debate with a slight shift in perspective allowing for the cultural dimension to weigh in more.

As suggested in the title – How Youth Culture Articulates. A Languaculture Incursion into Subcultural Youth Assemblages – the findings discussed in this volume are reached from a cultural perspective alongside language playing a seminal and meaningful role in the expression of subcultural aspects where youth are represented in the media, meet the media as consumers, and, as prosumers, descend into the social arena of the Social Network Sites to negotiate their status by way of multimedia communication. While they may have appeared as predominantly passive consumers before the Millennium, the agency has become visible with the emergence of the concept of 'prosumer', a portmanteau coinage encapsulating their double stance in practice as consumers and producers. As such, some of

the papers in this volume focus on how youth is represented in fiction or by the entertainment industries, the latter the holders of monopoly in assigning representations (in bygone eras), whereas others will insist on the self-empowering symbolic strategies by which subculture-oriented youth build a meaningful identity as groups or communities (distinct from the mainstream or other subcultural formations), defining of our times.

The discussion traversing the volume is set off by an introductory study balancing the early axiomatic tenets of Western youth culture with a thorough exploration of emerging theories even as the subcultural phenomena is alternately proliferating and hybridizing or fragmenting and atomizing only to recompose as multiple other variants. If within the first part, the emphasis lies with modernist contexts where structure and delineation are mandatory, the second takes into account the postmodern transformations of today's networked global village, which have triggered the need for a reconceptualization of youth aggregations as fluid and nebulous. The study is followed by a paper on urbochrematonyms as a novel subcategory in the onomastic field, in connection with the urban neotribes of Cluj-Napoca, Romania, expanding on their symbolism of shared experiences, preferences, and identity expression through socialization. The next paper discusses a Beatles feature film, the band epitomizing British Pop culture, celebrating irreverence while forging and engaging a prevailingly female fandom (see the Beatlemania phenomenon), as a cultural product that documents the construction of hybridized identity transitioning to the "self-authoring mind". The artistic product is amply analyzed and parallels, among other interpretations, a rite of passage with teenagers/young adults oscillating between the apparent security afforded by peer-group membership and adulthood with its incumbent responsibilities while navigating harrying emotional, affective and mind-setting transformations. Next in line is a set of papers produced by graduate students and dwelling on sociocultural aspects of youth assemblages as reflected in and through language/discourse. Discussing the power of reimagining the canon by queer fandom, revisiting the cult of non-conformity, analyzing Brexit memes using a Jakobsonian approach, examining fandom terminology in intercultural terms

and viral TikTok trends as instrumental to the forging and maintenance of digital cultures, comparing communities on different Social Network Sites are so many ways of scrutinizing the topicality of the youth-subculture–communication paradigm.

Publishing this volume has been an undertaking during which scholarly skills were honed. A mixed team of junior and senior authors working alongside, we have encountered several occasions for sharing expertise and enthusiasm, exercising the mirroring art of gentle criticizing and accepting criticism, and acknowledging teammates. Indeed, we want to thank our wonderful student contributors for showing unrelenting interest, earnest motivation, and trust in the process all the while under pressure from completing their separate mandatory graduate work.

We wish to end on a further grateful note by acknowledging Dr. Octavian More, Director of the British Cultural Studies MA Programme at the Faculty of Letters of Babeș-Bolyai University, for his contribution to the volume and endorsement of our project-teaming. It has provided all of us with an opportunity to grow and the hope that our resultative work is informative and relatable.

The Editors

From Nascent Youth Culture to Today's Style Streams. A Critical Cultural Documentation of Subculture-Oriented Youth

DIANA COTRĂU, OANA PAPUC

Introduction

This introductory study is designed as a two-part guide to youth subcultures pursuing a critical avenue. Our angle will underscore aspects purporting to hegemony, social and cultural attitudes, stances and status, dominance and subordination, power, and politics, be they symbolical or material, all of which were sensitive issues at a time when youth were starting to aggregate into subcultural structures, and which still are in our times of acute *isms*. The first part consists of a diachronic survey of the eminent Anglo-Saxon schools of thought created around and deriving from the sociocultural study of youth particularly in Britain and the United States. The synoptic tableau of the main postulates on youth subcultures, partial to the changing socioeconomic and cultural characteristics of the 1950s up to the noughties in Britain, will be continued in the second part with a state-of-the-art overview of the diversification of the theories expounded in the first section as well as of emergent ones, through the same

critical lens. Arguably, any exploration of the current youth-subcultural landscape is inextricably linked to Internet 2.0 and 3.0, which have turned digital socialization and communication into the key instruments for self-presentation and representation of permutating and micro-diversifying youth-subcultural aggregations. Displaying inherently global and fluid rather than regional and discrete features, subculture-oriented youth aggregations have deployed against the socio-historical backdrop of the past two decades a plurivalent and creative potential underpinned by the technology adeptness of native-born digital citizens. This refined bird's eye view captures punctiliously the formidable pluralization of the phenomena to date and discusses it in a critical fashion.

Part I
From the 1960's to the early 1980's: the dawn and rise of a sociocultural discipline

It has been said that teenagers as a social segment had been culturally and socially unacknowledged prior to post-war Europe (Storry and Childs 1997, 169). Until then, children had made the *sine qua non* shift to adulthood on reaching the consensual age. Consequently, teenagers per se did not spark an interest among academics until the 1950s. Even then, they became known mainly due to their perceived appetite for consumption and potential for delinquency. The Chicago School of Sociology[1], the first to elaborate theoretically on adolescents as a social segment, was famously located in a town known for its high incidence of crime, which could be reason enough for the perspective they embraced in studying youth. Indeed, the Chicago School scholars first and foremost scrutinized such misconduct as vagrancy, truancy, petty-thieving, or public disturbance notably correlating with the juvenile social segment that inhabited urban

1. The Chicago School of Sociology was set up in 1882 and is the birthplace of a school of sociological thought whose theories combining sociology and criminology became highly acknowledged in the early decades of the 20th century. Members of the School were the first to delve into urban sociology and to combine theory with ethnographic fieldwork.

settings and belonged to the working class. They were often totalized as urban youth perpetrators of the periphery both physically and symbolically. Thus, it could be said that, in the beginning, such youth were distinguished as *deviant*, and became the carriers of the semantic legacy of subordinate, disorder-generating social groups, thus lending themselves to critical analysis by cultural scholarship.

A step forward and to the left, the latter due to the Marxist perspective then trending Western academia (Steedman 1993, 46), was taken in Europe by the members of the Birmingham Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS)[2]. The Center became renowned for initiating a new discipline and conducting analyses at the intersection of popular culture, subculture, race, and mass media, based on which its members produced some formidable theories. A crucial impact was made through the choice of employing for the study of contemporary culture, the new discipline in question, an interdisciplinary approach under Marxist legacy (Steedman id., 40), featuring a perspective on social class and ideology in relation to culture and consciousness. Far from dissociating themselves from the sociologist and criminology angle at the heart of the towering Chicago School approach, the scholarly team enrolled the aid of fellow students with expertise in anthropology, literature, media studies *and* sociology to refine the burgeoning study of contemporary culture. Delinquency to different degrees was concatenated to juvenile offenders and was a central variable in the new sociocultural formulations. Moreover, as the press was frequently reporting on questionable youth activities in public or self-appropriated places (Cohen 1972a qtd. in Gelder and Thornton 1997), the text of their accounts fell into the category of empirical analytic material for the CCCS research. Oscillating between echoing and prompting public concerns and dissatisfaction, the media regularly had a say in how, for instance, the streets, as public spaces produced for adults, were used by working-class youth for hanging around, loitering, or engaging in other idle activities ritually deployed to signify resistance to public norms (Hall and Jefferson 1976), or the walls by graffiti artists to display alternative or

2. The Birmingham Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies dates from 1964 and was set up by Stuart Hall and Richard Hoggart as a research center at Birmingham University.

counter-art on surfaces intended for other purposes (Valentine, Skelton, Chambers, 1998, 7).

During the first decades of its existence, when the theoretical pieces were falling into place, the youth-deviance-ritual resistance triad became the crux of the new sociocultural paradigm. The mass media, albeit outside academia, had become a major aid in conceptualizing youth as marginal and unruly. The press accounts during the 1960s and 1970s were sourced for information to complete the findings of the CCCS members. Newspapers and television took a particular interest in the radicalization of working-class subcultural youth and had a legitimate interest in contributing to their spectacularity. Youth manifestations were regarded as particularly newsworthy when they materialized as physical actions encroaching upon the public domain, from vandalism to the local or nationwide infamous skirmishes between rival bands with subcultural undertones (for instance, the 1960s incidents in sea towns of Southern England). However, if the scholarly view of the matter was that the latter was just the visible tip of a complex iceberg, the media's rendering was narrow and one-sided. A strategically devised story would start with building near-apocalyptic expectations of imminent chaos at the hands of uncontrollable *folk-devils* (Cohen 1972b). However, the expectations worked bilaterally since many of the young people with subcultural inclinations found themselves emotionally tagged by the excitement anticipated by the press. The potential meeting between two perceived antagonistic groups of young people vested in subcultures, as per precedents, was then lent even more amplitude and snowballed. In the aftermath, adopting a justiciary discourse peppered with denigrating vocabulary, the press took it upon itself to voice public opprobrium and extrapolate it to include indiscriminately all adolescents with as little as a penchant for subcultural activities. The highly mediatized 1960s South-England occurrences[3] during the holidays, when it was customary for people to take some days off to enjoy the weather in the seaside cities of Brighton, Clacton and Margate, benefitted from eyewitness accounts

3. The most mediatized clashes between British Mods and Rockers took place in 1964, at Brighton Beach, Clacton-on-sea and Margate in Southern England, with the exaggerated media narratives antagonizing an already worried public.

given by members of the public, mostly vacationers, town dwellers and shop and small business owners who had been directly affected. Endorsed by the public rage in the aftermath of the incidents, the press resorted to labeling and demonizing youth for the combined purpose of triggering general outrage and increasing their sales. Through this strategic build-up of accounts, the press became the generator of moral panic campaigns featuring working-class young people as *the enemy*. While taking into account the position and attitudes reflected by the press vis-a-vis the matter, the cultural scholars developing their theories even as such episodes were unfolding interpreted them as a direct consequence of them being powerless, subordinate, marginal, vulnerable albeit irreverent.

The pioneering published product of the CCCS, which has remained to date an emblematic theoretical and empirical work on subcultures – *Resistance through Rituals. Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain* (1976) –, carried the signatures of luminaries such as Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke, Dick Hebdige, Brian Roberts, Paul Corrigan, Paul E. Willis, Angella McRobbie, and Jenny Garber (to name most but not all). The book was hailed at the time as benchmarking and has remained the vantage point from which subsequent work in the field was assessed. The reasons for its top-listing among the 20th century remarkable books in cultural studies do not reside solely in the introduction of a new discipline, but also in grounding it on a joint theoretical and ethnographic understanding of the practice of youth. The CCCS's investigation of the relationship between youth cultural tastes, politics and music was interdisciplinary, which gave way to deep insights and valid results that, in turn, engendered some enduring, hard-weighing theories that would be used as the axioms for discussing ensuing work. It is true, however, that in retrospect, the CCCS's theoretical portrayal of working-class youth subcultures was deemed rather romantic, singularizing males and extolling their 'heroic' deviance from the established norms against the hegemonic societal background. Another shortcoming was that they tended to pigeonhole females as non-spectacular. Girls were overlooked, consigned to the admittedly safe family space, or regarded as mere appendages to boys, *the* centerpieces of subcultures.

It took an actual female feminist scholar (McRobbie 1990, 16) to point out that the literature was male-biased and proceed to investigate and report programmatically on girls' material and symbolic actions as undermining gender-governed rules.

The CCCS postulated that the defiant youth posited mainly symbolic challenges to the mainstream, which begs the question what was meant by the syntagm? For that, we need to explore the socioeconomic and historical context in the two decades after the end of WWII and how they impacted British youth. Social relations were still regulated by the six-class system in Britain, with the working-class parent culture having experienced the war directly wishing for a better world for their children (Baby Boomers), and everyone struggling with post-conflagration personal and collective traumas. For themselves, youngsters were celebrating the new world even while they edged towards rebellion, attempting to deal a final blow to what they perceived as the lingering conscientious and societal norms of the old world. That translated as zest in transgressing traditional limits, ignoring social conventions, challenging norms and general politics, and embracing the nascent Pop Culture. All these aspects conflated into lofty defiance, which was regarded by the mainstream as a compelling sign of the gulf between generations.

There was a consequential reaction on the part of the mainstream, the law-abiding adults, official regulators and law-enforcing institutions, which often came in the form of marginalizing and down-putting the fringe young people through negative public opinion mirrored by the mass media. We should recall that media at the time was what we call in retrospect the Traditional Media, and consisted of the national television broadcasting to a mass audience and the daily press issuing a limited array of publications, both the mouthpieces for the dominant ideologies. Yet behind the editorial positionings, the media was ambivalent and had ulterior motives. On the one hand, such youth groups were seen as the public enemy, on the other hand, the press fed on their newsworthy manifestations and turned them into spectacles for profit. A vicious cycle was entered, triggering counterreactions as expected. Instead of feeling coerced

into playing down their outrage-provoking actions, the undaunted young people became even more radical and meaningful in their acts and consumption of Popular Culture (the opposite of high-brow culture). Pop stars became role models for overall behavior, they were both commodified and iconified, and issues such as experimenting with sexual orientation often promoted for marketable purposes or as avant-garde under artistic license were embraced by fans in a further attempt to challenge the mainstream. A new worldview entertained by young people was being shaped independently from mainstream conservative tastes and canons, but alongside beliefs, creeds, attitudes, and behaviors that gave rise to an ideology with political culture underpinnings.

Out of the amalgam of defiance and formidable transgression, a set of discrete, homogeneous youth aggregations emerged. Their morphing was at once determined and conditioned by their idiosyncracies in terms of music, worldviews, dressing codes, and focal activities. The first to be observed under these criteria were the Teddy Boys. The Mods, the Rockers, the Skinheads, and the Hippies followed suit denoting an effervescence in cultural creativity that coerced the public sphere into awareness and the fashion industry into sourcing inspiration thereof. Academic acknowledgement and early theorizing came in the form of conceptualizing the segment and accompanying manifestations in a homogenous manner, after case-studying them through mixed methods. Ethnography, anthropology, and sociology were additional domains that helped devise a structured portrait of subcultural youth. A historical perspective was also deemed necessary, as the socioeconomic and cultural context had to be analyzed to legitimize the CCCS tenets. The contention was that living standards in general had been rising during the two and a half decades after World War II, which, among other outcomes, materialized as more money in the parents' coffers and the pockets of the progeniture. One cause was the steady build-up of the economy with positive prospects for the future as well as a change in the social becoming of adolescents. Rather than plunging into marriage straight after graduating school, girls would either take up jobs that made them financially independent or go to college to further

their education. In both cases, this usually meant postponing marriage and its incumbent responsibilities, which afforded them the money and the time to indulge in leisure and fashion-related expenditures. Likewise, boys found employment and stopped depending on their parents for subsistence. The consumption of cultural goods, mostly Pop-connected paraphernalia, increased and became the prevalent interest of most young people. Despite that, the sentiment of being second-class citizens didn't leave them and they continued engaging in ritual acts symbolizing resistance to their designated status.

Intentional communication through style

At this point, Hebdige (1979) opted to diversify the CCCS's archetypal theorizations of youth by seeking to accommodate the cultural changes shadowing the emerging socioeconomic situation in the West. His (and others') was a successful engagement to reconsider the relationship between youth subcultures, society at large, and the marketing industries as the latest to join the line of stakeholders.

The Punks were *the* subculture that had captured sociocultural the scholars' attention, hailing a new, slightly touched portrait of the discrete subcultures enunciated by CCCS. On December 1, 1976, the Sex Pistols made an appearance on BBC (a last-minute solution to replace the originally scheduled Queen, the band). A volcanic debut on the British screens, it was an important moment in the band's history which played live one of their songs aptly named *Anarchy in the UK*. They are preserved in public memory as a band that managed to shock the mainstream with their identity-defining penchant for breaking sartorial and language taboos. Their rhetoric was labeled outrageous and desecrating, their dress was considered offensive and ludicrous, and the make-up theatrical and over-the-top. Their TV appearance was deemed quintessentially a histrionic reflux of anarchic beliefs, attitudes, and behavior. The music produced and performed was declared 'noise' (Hebdige 1979). Indeed, the constituents of their style, assembled as particular taste in music and dress, subverting drives, DIY philosophy, and ostensible breaking of societal taboos, were

loud and unacceptable cacophonies for the mainstream. It was the particular example of Punks and Skinheads that was employed to argue for a more adequate term – *style* – to encapsulate the self-assertion of subcultures, and *homology of style* for a more accurate description of how homologous aspects will morph a style (subculture) (Hebdige 1979, 114). Hebdige advanced the notion of style as more representative and suggestive than that of subcultures, contending that these non-conformists' choice of dress was intentional, loaded with meanings, and highly ideological. Suggestive efforts hovered around reassigning new purposes to trivial objects and turning them into emblematic items (the safety pin, torn jeans, body piercing, spike chockers) as offensive decoration. The repurposing of mundane objects to serve as subcultural badges and assigning them new, subverted meanings was tantamount to anarchy-oriented subcultural idiosyncrasy. The dress code and the music preferences were homologous with specific worldview-driven beliefs and actions, forming an appealing and meaningful ensemble. In conjunction with Umberto Eco's famous pronouncement "You speak through your clothes", Hebdige contended that in the case of Punks and Skinheads it was particularly their sartorial tactics that ensured their presence was not only felt but was singularly decoded as rebellion against the establishment. An instantiation of the *semiotic guerrilla warfare*, the forceful syntagmatic notion also produced by Eco, their belligerent styles were intentional communication, obviously fabricated and loaded with choice, abusing codes and canons with the expressed purpose of creating disorder (Hebdige, id. 100).

Hebdige echoed in his reboot of youth subcultures the latent negativity of the mainstream. He likened the manifestations of such marginal youth to a fracture in the natural and normal workings of society, an *unnatural break*. The Marxist-inspired CCCS claim that the marginal youth - mainstream antagonism was a form of class conflict was couched in the Barthes-inspired theory (the founding text of practical ideology critique) (Barthes 1957 qtd. in Durring 1993, 42) as a case of the self-sufficient bourgeois fearing the *other*'s attacks on the status quo. Such apprehensions, continued Hebdige, usually lead to recuperative action, whereby the

mainstream acts on natural impulse to make sense of the alternately exotic, hilarious, or threatening youth and relocate them on the societal cultural map. The recuperation, according to Hebdige (94), takes two forms: (1) the commodity form, whereby the subcultural signs (dress, music, etc.) are converted into mass-produced objects, and (2) the ideological form, the deviant behaviour is re-defined by dominant groups through labeling. In the first case, some of the exemplifications included Vivienne Westwood's introduction of the Punk vibe into haute couture as confrontation dressing, which was later diffused along the network of retail stores, and, eventually, defused, as happens with fads, which due to the short-lived value of cool quickly become dated (at best, periodically recycled), or, by using to use the more complex and ideology-laden Barthian wording, naturalized. In the second case, the deriding and demeaning terms used by the media, especially across their moral panic campaigns, are testimony to how journalistic discourse was luxuriously negative-stereotyping subcultural youth. However, the underlying rationalization of the media was conflicting: the potential for disorder was maximized concomitant with casting deviant youth as petty nuisance that should and could be readily dealt with by adequate institutions and moral instances.

The Pragmatic streak: the mid-to-late-1980s and the 1990s

As Western societies advanced under the impact of economic progress, heightened life standards were registered due to the stabilization of new attitudes and lifestyles. The increase in material wealth in general contributed to a shift in mentalities. Whereas the activities of subcultural youth of the prior decades had been dictated by a combination of hedonistic and anarchic impulses in variable ratios, a marked change now flagged pragmatism. This radical shift was identified and diagnosed by the scholars who formed The Manchester Institute for Popular Culture in the first half of the 1990s. Led by Steve Redhead and Derek Wynne, the Manchester Center gave due credit to the axiomatic theories and generic results produced by the CCCS, but contributed its own notional and conceptual innovations as alternatives anchored in the new realities of the decade. The focus of

its research was situated at the intersection of pop culture, media, and education, and rather than continuing the romantic and apologetic tenor employed in explaining the subcultural heroics of the '60s and the '70s, it established that popular culture *shaped* society values, identities, and power structures. This was encapsulated in papers and books culminating with the iconic *The End of the Century Party: Youth and Pop Towards 2000* (1990). The seminal volume proclaimed the end of youth culture within the new conformism, in tune with the postmodern undercurrent traversing society and culture. The notion of club culture was advanced as a fitting replacement for subculture to indicate the consumption of a designated set of tastes in specific spaces (Muggleton and Weinzierl 2003, 6). The proposition for replacement also documented another major shift in scholarly position on the association between youth and popular culture, underscored by the notice of change in pop thinking. It discarded its fascination for style, packaging and synthetic sounds and made content and socially conscious lyrics its new fetish.

This period featured several youth culture scholars as the representatives of the post-CCCS epoque. Sarah Thornton stood out by her interest in and highlighting of the way club cultures are intent on signaling their singularity from the mainstream. Inspired by Bourdieu's theorization of symbolic capital as constituted by signs of distinction (e.g. language or dress codes), and actions of distinction (e.g. consumption of music) as equally as important for social stratification as the accumulation of economic capital, Thornton coined the term subcultural capital directly applicable to youth. According to Muggleton and Weinzierl (9), Thornton substantiates the idea that clubbers actively and knowingly use *subcultural capital* as an ideological resource through which they attain *hip* or *cool* status, which they then protect against diffusion and recuperation by the mainstream. Thornton noted that it was important for clubbers to keep knowledge and manifestations of cool underground, out of the reach of the marketing industries keen on capitalizing on them, and that the cool status holders stay *authentic* and do not sell out, that is, do not succumb to the lure of becoming commercial. Contrary to the CCCS theory that

the mainstream was continually instrumenting a relocation of subcultural youth on the map of preferred meanings, Thornton focuses on what she sees as the struggle of clubbers to safeguard their core ideological constituents from being normalized and their distinction leveled out. At this point, she rediscusses the monopolistic and monolithic role the media plays vis-à-vis subcultural youth. She starts by remarking on its diversification and ramification into mass-media (catering to general audiences), niche media (delivering products to targeted audiences), and micro-media (informal, unedited media produced by youth for youth). She, then, enunciates the function of media as the main channel for "the movement and distribution through cultural and social hierarchies of subcultural capital". According to Muggleton and Weinzierl (2003, 10) the novelty brought about by Thornton is that the media are integral to the construction of subcultures by naming and describing them, whereas the CCCS had purported that the existence of subcultures preceded their treatment by the press.

The noughties: Post subcultures

Before 2000, there had already been a non-negligible move from a modern to a postmodern framework for analyzing subcultural phenomena, as noted by Muggleton and Weinzierl (11). Preoccupations formed less around the discrete, distinct sociocultural structures of youth subcultures but focused, rather, on the emerging post-traditional forms of sociality, or *tribes* in Michel Maffesoli's (qtd. in Muggleton and Weinzierl, 11) terms. In the post-modern world, social structures were less fixed and rigid and instead fluid and nebulous. Fluidity was perceived as permeating social and cultural aspects, with academia absorbing the notion. Fluidity connoted becoming as opposed to being, and Judith Buttler, a philosopher of the feminist theory, integrated it with the concept of performativity making it highly relatable to (sub)cultural studies where gender was at issue. If experimenting with sex and gender-bending inclinations had been an avantgarde signposting of youth movements as early as the 1960s, with fans considered to be copy-catting Pop role models, Butler's notion of the gender issue stemming from such progressive pronunciations as "gender

is not to be equated with sex" and "gender roles are maintained by being continually performed" (Butler 1990 qtd. in Durring 1993, 340) was met with interest by sociocultural analysts. Accordingly, subcultures, it was now asserted, are not definitive, demarcated structures but are continually constructed through everyday cultural practices. And where else to perform if not on the social media platforms, the new arena for social interaction.

Internet 1.0 and especially 2.0 and their affordances enable young people with subcultural interests to connect with like-minded individuals across the globe, without spatial or time limitations. These are globalizing facilitative times for intersubjectivities to cross even further, validating the established ones while leaving an open door to diversification but also to local clustering. Deglobalizing trends are just as instrumental with subcultural identities expressed creatively on both individual and collective levels. Today's *produsers* (a fusion between *producer* and *user*) display their agency on social networking sites affording the emergence and maintenance of presentational and participatory cultures (Jenkins et al. 2006) by conjoining digital artistic talent and civic engagement, which has become particularly meaningful for youth in general. However, it would seem that all of these changes have reached the zenith and are now assuming an almost oppositional, yet progressive, directionality accelerated by the relentless advance of digital technologies.

Part II

The phrase "Internet aesthetics" has become increasingly relevant as the go-to umbrella term to which the digital youth seem to have been gradually reorienting in claiming somewhat of a shifting allegiance, in the cultural turmoil of the current decade. This so-called "aesthetics" is otherwise known or referenced with the help of the moniker "core", usually appended in suffixed position to an identifying genre-label (i.e. "dreamcore", "mermaidcore", "nightcore"). To a much lesser degree, the more colloquial phrasing "vibe" is used to denote a rather vague meaning ascribed to certain activities or a particular look. The latter term has been officially

introduced as a legitimate entry in the *Merriam-Webster* dictionary, under the definition of "a distinctive feeling or quality capable of being sensed"[4], whereas *Urban Dictionary* defines the same term as "a distinctive emotional atmosphere; sensed intuitively"[5]. It is precisely this ambiguous description of the emotional atmosphere that characterizes these digital art forms that highlight one of their most distinctive traits, the fact that they appear to be ambiguous enough they carry the ability to cater to a myriad of tastes. This is especially relevant when compared to the subcultural genres of earlier decades, communities whose focal points of coagulation were, in a sense, much easier to establish (see the mods, punks, hippies of the '60s and the '70s, the rockers, grunge and alternative scenes of the '80s and '90s, alongside the plastic pop of the early 2000s, the hip-hop and hipster cultures of the late noughties and 2010s). This was partly due to many of the alternative options to mainstream culture appearing precisely for the purpose of rebelling against the status quo, with later iterations of alternative genres ending in opposition to each other (Hebdige 1979).

Giolo and Berghman (2023) argue in favor of conceptualizing the creation and continuous repurposing/emergence of the numerous aesthetic categories of contemporary digital landscapes in the form of "toolkits [used] to create subjectively recognizable identities in highly fluid and miscible realities". In a culturally fragmented terrain as the one of 2024, a postpandemic, post-postmodern space plagued by bouts of social upheaval, tainted by a worrying rise of fascist ideology in a handful of European countries, with housing crises worldwide, a volatile rise of AI, on top of the looming threat of climate change, the tension is palpable. Then, it is no wonder that younger generations seem to encounter tremendous difficulty looking forward to any sort of bright future. This state of affairs, in turn, must create a sense of anxiety, panic, loss and confusion, encumbering the individuation process that young adults traverse on their way to adulthood.

The process of individuation through cultural experimentation and identity expression has become diffused, mirroring the massively disjointed

4. "Vibe", *Merriam-Webster*, *https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/vibe*, accessed 6 July 2024.

5. "Vibe", *Urban Dictionary*, *https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Vibe*, accessed 6 July 2024.

cultural landscape of today. The idea is substantiated by the fact that it is primarily young adults who seem to struggle with various mental health issues, as reported in "The Mental State of the World" (2021), a survey carried out across 34 countries in Internet-enabled populations in the so-called Core Anglosphere, in Latin America, the Arab speaking-countries, French and Spanish speaking continental Europe, and Africa. Researchers at Sapiens Lab cite a "global decline in younger generations", especially respondents in the 18-24 age range (the Anglosphere) ranking high in categories "Distressed" or "Struggling" (44%), and only 19% in the "Succeeding" or "Thriving" range (21). The same cohort ranked quite poorly on the five domains part of the Mental Wellbeing Quotient (MHQ) — Cognition, Drive & Motivation, Mood & Outlook, Social Self, and Mind-Body Connection — particularly on the Social Self scale, compared to previous (pre-pandemic) years. This global trend seems particularly relevant for the English-speaking world, the authors further relating these alarming trends to younger generations' perception of self and ability to sustain stable relationships, which are believed to be correlated with rising suicide rates and violence (6). Among the reasons cited as potentially contributing to the current (and quite possibly) future state of affairs is the increased use of the Internet and a surge in mobile phone usage.

In fact, according to Statista[6], as of 2023, more than 70% of the world's population is believed to own at least one smartphone, with a daily amount of approximately 143 minutes spent browsing only social media apps, across the globe (Petrosyan 2024)[7]. Additionally, the average amount of time spent online by Internet users in 2023, according to Statista, reportedly amounts to roughly six hours per day, the most frequented websites being Google, YouTube and Facebook, the latter collecting three billion monthly active users on a regular basis (Dixon 2024a)[8]. In fact, Facebook is still the number one leading social media app worldwide, closely followed by

6. "Topic: Smartphones." *Statista*, *https://www.statista.com/topics/840/smartphones/#topicOverview*. Accessed 29 June 2024.
7. "Time Spent Online Worldwide 2023." *Statista*, *https://www.statista.com/statistics/1380282/daily-time-spent-online-global/*. Accessed 29 June 2024.
8. "Biggest Social Media Platforms 2024." *Statista*, *https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/*. Accessed 29 June 2024.

YouTube, Instagram and TikTok (Bianchi 2024)[9]. Leading search queries on YouTube consist of the following general terms, in this order: "song", "movie", "video", "songs", "how to", according to recent data published by Statista (2024); and as of April 2024 (Cardillo 2024), leading queries gathered from the U.S. highlight the following YouTube categories/vloggers ranking among the most frequently searched categories: "PewDiePie" being the content creator with currently, the largest number of followers, with 4,570,000 searches; "ASMR" with 4,040,000 searches, the term standing as abbreviation for "autonomous sensory meridian response", meaning the physiological sensations felt by audiences when watching other people perform different activities; "Music" with 3,350,000 searches; "Markiplier" with 2,970,000, one of the most influential vloggers and film producers, renowned for reviewing indie horror games; "Old Town Road", musician Lil Nas X's song released in 2018 with 2,500,000 searches, and singer "Billie Eilish" with 2,360,000 searches. The list also contains entries such as "lofi", "lofi hip-hop" and "nightcore".

In global audiences' preferences (Ceci 2024)[10], the number one YouTube query seems to be "BTS", the South Korean boyband, with 16,720,000 searches; closely followed by "Pewdiepie" with 16,500,000; "ASMR" with 14,660,000, "Billie Eilish" with 13,800,000, "Baby Shark", the infamous children's song, with 12,110,000 searches; "Old Town Road" with 10,460,000; and "Music" with 10,230,000. Other notable entries reference famous singers such as Ariana Grande, Blackpink, Eminem, Queen; the Despacito song, Minecraft, Peppa the Pig, as well as the term "nightcore", among many others.

Finally, the platform regularly releases a compendium of the past year's emerging trends, the 2023 "YouTube Culture & Trends Report" stating that the rapidly changing technology, here included AI generative tools, in addition to the numerous tweaks brought about to the large variety of apps and digital devices used by people worldwide have caused major shifts in both content creator and consumer behavior in using digital content. The

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9. "Topic: Top Websites Worldwide." *Statista*, *https://www.statista.com/topics/12081/top-websites-worldwide/#topicOverview*. Accessed 27 June 2024.

10. "Global Top YouTube Search Queries 2024", *Statista*, *https://www.statista.com/statistics/1357151/top-youtube-queries-global/*. Accessed 29 June 2024.

report envisions the future of popular culture being largely shaped, not only influenced, by viewers and creators — "as multiformat, multi-device consumption becomes the norm, new tools and technologies are democratizing the creative process and enabling bigger, bolder ideas to become a reality" (2). In fact, it is primarily because of the latest advancements in the large-scale distribution of AI tools, Instagram and TikTok video editing updates that online user behavior has flourished even more visibly through User Generated Content (UGC) on social media. The concept can be understood as "(digital) media content generated by people outside of professional media institutions, often for no pay, which is made available to the public" (Daubs 2020 qtd. in Bolin 2021, 267). The concept has also been likened to the characterization offered to online media users' different levels of engagement through the use of the term "prosumer" meant to highlight the participatory nature of consumption practices (Bolin 2021). At the same time, these concepts highlight another crucial change in the reception of art and digital content, in terms of distinctions made between amateur versus professional production, especially in networked forms of communication, several studies pointing to the increased likelihood of UGCs in markedly influencing consumer attitudes and practices for seemingly appearing much more authentic than corporate marketing campaigns and strategies (Saura et al. 2022). Consequently, the rise of Internet aesthetics and UGC on social media provides the perfect breeding ground for identity exploration and expression within the confines of current major cultural shifts.

Furthermore, the phrase "fan remixed content" used in the "YouTube Culture and Trends Report 2023" perfectly describes not only much of the content popular in many of the Internet aesthetics to be discussed in what follows, but also the primary methods of creation, in addition to AI enhanced videos that seem to be steadily growing in popularity by enticing audience engagement in the millions. The YouTube report forecasts these as being trailblazing methods of creation for future cultural genres, becoming "normalized" consumer behavior. The same report cites having surveyed hundreds of consumer behavior trends popular in 14 different

countries, including the U.S., the U.K., Australia, Brazil, Canada, Egypt, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Japan, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, and South Korea, respondents being categorized as adults between the ages of 18 to 44, with a smaller subcategory, Gen Z respondents aged between 18 to 24. Eighty-two percent of the respondents stated posting video content to Instagram Stories, TikTok, YouTube, Snapchat, and other social media platforms over the course of the past 12 months, the report dubbing the respondents as "amateur editors". Likewise, rates of consumption seem to be increasing, with the majority of surveyed participants claiming to watch particular topics of interest in multiple formats (short-form, long-form, live streams, and podcasts), in addition to a regular consumption, distribution or creation of memes. Features such as closed-captions, multi-language audio tracks, or video editing instruments in the form of clipping, filters, effects, or tools used to create digital avatars allow YouTube users to personalize their content and cater to multiple media formats, significantly enhancing their creative potential and the possibility of reaching wider audiences. The 2023 report also highlights how The Shorts section featured on YouTube is often used to cross-connect to typically short-form TikTok content. Crucially, one of the most noteworthy takeaways of the report is emphasizing how the digital realm offers plenty of room for dynamic changes to take place in networked communication (multimodal and multiformat) while highlighting the increased levels of personalization that these changes afford Internet users, changes that have become normalized Internet user expectations.

Similar affordances can also be observed in the widespread proliferation of Internet aesthetics over the past few years. In essence, Internet aesthetics is "characterized by presenting an experience of sorts, a subjectively defined atmosphere" (Giolo and Berghman 2023), one of the most significant traits of the digital microgenres when compared to the more established and well-defined subcultures of previous decades. Displaying little consistency in their construction, in the meanings co-created by community members, the boundaries between genres and subgenres being extremely permeable, the affordances produced by the technological

changes observed over the last few decades are likely to accelerate in the aftermath of the 2020 pandemic.

In fact, it looks as if the Covid-19 pandemic was the great catalyst of what are now some of the most well-known UGCs in the form of Internet aesthetics (i.e. cottagecore, dark academia, weirdcore), these constituting, in essence, modes of self-expression that helped both consumers and producers of digital content cope with the social isolation and harsh restrictions of the lockdowns. Consequently, digital aesthetics constitutes a set of contemporary modes of meaning-making and identity negotiation and construction through various forms of digital media, helping the inhabitants of the liminal (Turner 1974), heterotopic (Foucault 2024) Internet make sense of their reality.

> We observe that Internet aesthetics primarily serve as toolkits, through which individuals give sense and coherence to personal experience, in line with a situation-specific self-image. In doing so, they contribute to a reflexive myth of the self. (Giolo and Berghman 2023)

These highly fragmented conglomerations of intersecting genres provide today's necessary cultural respites and modes of meaning-making to serve as different communities' management of our current sociocultural climate. This climate is rendered in the "YouTube Trends and Cultural Report 2023" as a "fragmented monoculture" (14) which might be better understood, using another phrase borrowed from the same source as "mainstream casual creativity" (14), which seems to be abounding. There is an increasing number of types of content available, in different formats, a myriad of different methods of editing video and audio content, served to an ever-increasing number of audiences, all amounting to "more ways to express fandom" (14). Indeed, from the total number of respondents in the 2023 report (n= 25,892), 40% labeled themselves as "video content creators". Additionally, the report differentiates between several layers of fandom: casual fans are those who mostly consume content, active fans

are those that might use the digital tools at their disposal to create shorts, memes or to interact with a brand's products or services by repurposing the brand's digital content. The third category includes a tier that creates content for other fans, while professional fans create content for a general audience. A special category altogether seems to be relegated to the fans who make use of AI enhancing tools, 60% of all surveyed participants acknowledging that they are open to consuming AI enhanced content. Thus, the digital landscape of social media and the Internet has become a great example of the paradoxical nature of today's culture — greatly fragmented into countless micro-communities catering to distinct niche tastes. And yet many appear simultaneously engrossed in the content catered by monotonous Internet streaming services, and digital apps owned by the Google/Apple/Facebook/Amazon digital ecosystem aka GAFA stack (Busta 2021).

The paradoxical nature of digital culture – the deeply fragmented monoculture

Before diving into the particularities of some of today's most recognizable 'neotribes' (Bennett 1999) and their contemporary modes of expression through Internet aesthetics, it is paramount to investigate our current cultural framework. This might be described as stuck somewhere between the great pressure of algorithms turning content into something easily digestible and the freely accessible digital tools of social media, as well as the highly personalized niche genres catering to the many subjective tastes of individual Internet users. As discussed in the first half of our study, when examining the timeline of the development of some of the most recognizable countercultures of our collective past, it becomes clear that with the advent of Web 2.0, as well as the economic and social changes of the last five decades, the pull between globalization, glocalization and deglobalization (Cotrău and Cotoc 2017) has affected the communication of subcultural capital (Thornton 1995). The large-scale ongoing spread of the English language, as predicted by David Crystal since the 1990s, has left a heavy mark on the creation of Internet-based subcultures and their subsequent diffusion into countless microgenres. English being the language

of the Internet has also made possible the creation of many "online taste communities" (Chayka 2019) unrestricted by the bounds of geographical space and temporal limitations. It is virtually possible for anyone with an Internet connection to potentially join and/or create other taste communities built around today's so-called Internet aesthetics, or '-core' genres. The one thread linking all of these potential members and one of the gateways into these micro-communities is simply that of being an English speaker. Today, English has dethroned Mandarin Chinese from being the language spoken by the largest number of speakers worldwide (Dyvik 2024)[11].

"Monoculture" can be understood as "the emergence of consensus" due to the workings of "homophily and assimilative social influence", this framework "offer[ing] a possible explanation of the emergence of global diversity and local clustering of cultural attitudes" (Flache 2018, 1001). Assimilative social influences simply indicate individuals' natural tendency of opting for social convergence, adopting their interlocutors' opinions, preferences and even cultural attitudes due to social pressures, the appearance of external expertise/authority or simply through modes of persuasion. According to Flache's use of agent-based computational modelling (ABCM), it appears that social influence can lead to cultural attitudes and related phenomena being adapted at a macro-scale starting from the interactions of agents, individuals. In other words, the model can be used to explain the complex webbing that exists between micro-cultural and macro-cultural scales and how one influences the other, especially when agents come in contact within networked modes of communication. It is this tension between diversity and uniformity, especially in terms of cultural differences, that the model manages to analyze thoroughly. One of the most important research methods carried out on early models of assimilative influence concludes that "(...) global consensus is inevitable in a connected (...) network — in which there are no components that are entirely disconnected from outside influences" (Flache 2018, 1001). Although the models emphasize that even when networked forms of communication are connected, "some level of local convergence alongside

11. "The Most Spoken Languages Worldwide 2023." *Statista*. *https://www.statista.com/statistics/266808/the-most-spoken-languages-worldwide/*. Accessed 29 June 2024.

global diversity can be maintained at least in the medium term, for example, when networks exhibit strong local clustering of relations" (ibid.), which is arguably a mirror rendering of how online subcultural genres and subgenres seem to function. Most crucially, these analyses point to the relevance of even pair-driven interrelationships and communication in potentially influencing macro-level tendencies.

However, in understanding the life cycle and particularities of Internet subcultures and the neotribes of the 21st century (Bennett 1999), another key aspect of our contemporary networked modes of communication is the reign of the algorithm. In Kyle Chayka's 2019 article titled "Can Monoculture Survive the Algorithm? And Should It?", the concept of monoculture is defined as "a Pleasantville image of a lost togetherness that was maybe just an illusion in the first place, or a byproduct of socioeconomic hegemony". The author piercingly highlights that many of the cultural artifacts of mainstream popular culture, such as the famous American sitcom Seinfeld for instance, have become renowned worldwide not necessarily because they were greater than other cultural products of the time, but because they were the cultural artifacts that were readily available to consumers and intensely promoted by the media giants of the time. The same can be said about the algorithmic culture of social media and the "monolithic culture" which promote standardized ideas, ideals, and cultural values made widely available through the streaming services that have replaced the more traditional types of media (Chayka 2019).

On the one hand, this could help a wide variety of people become cognizant of the same cultural reference points and thus give somewhat of an impression of belonging to a larger community, a mainstream of sorts through the consumption of the same cultural products. Of course, how these cultural products carry symbolic meanings for members of different socioeconomic and political backgrounds is a different story. Glimpses into these interpretations and narratives are offered by other fans discussing, analyzing these cultural products by posting memes, maybe engaging in creating short form or long form video content which address various issues. But how does one get hold of a specific analysis/discussion/post/

article? Probably by sheer luck combined with the algorithmic forces which may push an individual towards their desired destination, or may not, since the current algorithmic models that most people have access to have been proven to be biassed to a certain extent (Ferrara 2024). Lastly, the author ends on a hopeful note. What might save us all from "monotonous culture" is to resist it, to search for that which causes unease, lack of familiarity, and strangeness, which are equally important to universality and familiarity. Crucially, these algorithmic forces create filter bubbles and echo-chambers that content consumers are not necessarily aware of (Arguedas et al. 2022), a phenomenon which might also explain the great diversity of Internet aesthetics which contribute, in a sense, to the fragmentation of our digital cultural landscape.

Internet aesthetics and the '-core' subgenres. Scenes of contemporary neotribes: dark academia, vaporwave, cottagecore, nightcore and indie sleaze revival

As previously discussed, the concept of Internet aesthetics references the genre labels used for identifying various activities, consumption and distribution practices, as well as creation of cultural artifacts repurposed by Internet users for initially, micro-level use. Over time, by gaining enough traction through various means (meme-fication and turning viral) online communities start coalescing around particular themes, subjective tastes, interests and attitudes.

> Music styles, literary works from multiple (and often contrasting) genres, television shows, and hobbies are grouped together without accounts as to why they belong to such categories, what roles they play within these constructions, their uses, or their resonance with each other. (Giolo and Berghman 2023)

In a sense, these "taste communities" display little consistency in their construction, in the meanings co-created by community members, the boundaries between genres and subgenres being extremely permeable. A

significant portion of the activities of such niche communities resides in the endless curation of “expanding collections of cultural objects” (Giolo and Berghman 2023) easily recognizable with the help of genre labels such as “dark academia”, “normcore”, “nightcore”, etc., many of which are actively updated on the fandom created website *Aesthetics Wiki*. The digital encyclopedia can be used to get informed about many of the neighboring subgenres of one preferred aesthetic. However, the structure of Aesthetics Wiki itself is reflective of the subjective, somewhat haphazard manner in which these genre distinctions are made, with a limited number of discursive practices used to argue or criticize the validity of these delineations (Giolo and Berghman 2023). At the same time, some category entries showcase specific points of reference as being meaningful to the subgenre, such as cult movies, particular music and fashion styles, engaging in selective activities, while others do not. Thus, the somewhat existing delineation between genres and subgenres is mostly achieved through personal listings of category objects in various formats: as posts on Instagram, TikTok, and to a lesser degree Tumblr (textual and visual signifiers), in addition to videoclips. Short form content is prevailingly posted through TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook reels, whereas long form content is usually published on YouTube.

For instance, the *dark academia* subgenre promotes an idealized, romanticized view of academic pursuits and encourages activities such as spending time in libraries, being dressed in a similar fashion to the characters in the cult film *Dead Poets Society*, and being interested in classic literature, especially those pertaining to the Romantic genre. Other subcultural specific identifiers include recreating a sense of the imagined atmosphere of the prep schools, boarding schools and Ivy League colleges from the second half of the 20th century to the 1940s (Adriaansen 2022). Adriaansen theorizes that the functions of the pandemic-born Internet subculture are manifold. On the one hand, this aestheticized view of academia might have functioned as a way of escaping into a world that managed to cancel out the anxiety and hardship of imposed isolation during the lockdowns while allowing youth to play pretend for a while, imagining what it would

be like for academic life to take its normal course. On the other hand, the suggested activities, reading books, consuming art, curating an interest for (neo)-Gothic architecture while adorning dark academia paraphernalia could still be somewhat realized during the pandemic even if through mostly solitary activities. Then, by joining social media platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, Pinterest, Tumblr (a microblogging website founded in 2007), all hosts of the many posts, pictures, blogs, links to music or videos and all other subcultural identifiers of these various Internet subgenres, communities would start coagulating around these themes, ultimately creating entire fandom communities, involved in continuously curating the latest additions to the ever-changing digital styles. Adriaansen (2002, 105) highlights the following passage taken verbatim from a Tumblr post, dated August 2020, to emphasize the personal interpretation of the dark academia genre offered by one such fan, *@sappylittlebitch*, in one of their posts:

> black coffees and teas, silver signet rings, worn paperbacks, ink smudged hands, eyes in starlight, frayed sweaters, cashmere, wine colored lips, dark lashes, the smell of liquor and cigars, broken glass, humming softly down corridors, stacks of books all around your room, oak and vanilla, the perfect mix of sugar and poison, speaking in ancient languages, rain fogging your glasses, old clocks ticking, vinyl static, searching for meaning, lines of poetry written down your arms, obscured by an air of ambiguity, morally grey … murder?

Furthermore, Adriaansen posits that the dark academia subgenre manages to subvert the institutionalized rules of traditional college and campus life, which for hundreds of years were only accessible to the white, rich elites through "counter-curation practices" (2002, 105). This reimagined space becomes one to rewrite history to some extent and to allow marginal identities and queerness to find a safe space within. Clearly, this interpretation seems to be substantiated by Giolo and Berghman's (2023)

framing Internet aesthetics as modes of contemporary individuation in a drastically fragmented cultural landscape.

At the same time, even though the function of providing a form of escape is not unlike the driving forces behind the creation of subcultures from earlier decades, the Internet aesthetics of today are recognizable with the help of the genre-defying and genre-distinguishing labels (i.e. dark academia, cottagecore, mermaidcore, to name a few). The exact cultural objects/artifacts they allude to, even to members within the same community, are amenable to endless subjective interpretation and reinterpretation, meaning that the primary method of membership assertion to these niche genres is mostly done through exemplification and detailing of subjective experience (Giolo and Berghman 2023). The same method is listed by Adriaansen (2022) as a primary means of Internet subcultural creation and community building, using the phrase "counter-curation". The latter should be understood as "a way in which the archive is shaped affectively and in which a taste community is formed" (Mondin 2017 qtd. in Adriaansen, 108). However, herein lies one important distinction from Giolo and Berghman's (2023) take on the creation and continuous negotiation of genre boundaries of the myriad Internet aesthetics — the fact that dark academia actively critiques the capitalistic gatekeeping of marginal identities from institutions of social prestige such as Ivy League colleges and other similarly coded academic spaces.

An equally ambivalent function has been designated to other popular digital niche-genres circulating the Internet, here included the one digital subcultural movement that seems to be more than just a fading Internet trend, but more so a bridge that helps connect the subcultures from previous decades to the digitized forms of expression of today. Of course, this is the vaporwave genre. In fact, the term vaporwave has become the subcultural designator for countless related subgenres, some being more well established in terms of sound, ideology and aesthetic (vaportrap, mallsoft, future funk), while others seemingly leaning heavily on a set of promoted ideas and values in the form of particularized visual aesthetics

and much less on a specific sound (VHS pop, semi-related microgenre simpsonswave, city pop).

Killeen (2018) defines the vaporwave genre as one that took shape on the Internet as an "audiovisual music genre and visual aesthetic, vaporwave channels remnants of popular culture, advertising, and consumer technology from the 1980s and early 1990s" (626). The very first iterations of the genre are deemed by researchers to be, in a sense, an extension of the synthwave and seapunk strands, the first being a prime example of a 2000s-born scene of electronic music which straightforwardly embraces the electronic music of the '80s and '90s, in a relatively nostalgic, revivalist fashion. Synthwave is seen as closely connected to the soundtracks of famous sci-fi movies, aspects of '80s' geek culture, early video game culture, its predecessors being the darkwave, synthpop, post-punk scenes of the same decade. The term synthwave is sometimes used interchangeably with the names of other partially overlapping niche-genres such as "chillwave", "outrun," "retrowave," "futuresynth", "darksynth", "dreamwave", and the list could go on (Merlini 2023). These genres mostly seem to longingly look back at the past through rose-tinted spectacles, in a bittersweet recollection of what technology and the world of the future appeared to promise, hinting that in actuality we fare closer to the dystopian worlds depicted in cyberpunk fiction and cinema.

Seapunk, on the other hand, began as a Twitter joke brought to life by Brooklyn DJ Julian Foxworth who supposedly had a dream about a "seapunk leather jacket with barnacles where the studs used to be". The New York Times dubbed the movement as a "Venice Beach Acid Rave 1995" or an "Atlantis 90s cyberpunk aesthetics" easily recognizable through its identifiers in the form of aquatic symbols, dolphins, waves, and other images in tints of blues and greens. Other elements of seapunk iconography include surf-wear logos, yin-yang symbols, T-shirts inscribed with images of pixelated sharks, neon-glow sticks, gifs featuring images of dolphins jumping through pyramids, and blue-haired mermaids wearing SpongeBob T-shirts, mostly found in the form of online collages. In terms of seapunk music, bands such as Fire for Effect, Zombelle, Ultrademon,

Unicorn Kid and Splash Club 7 have created a style described as "spacey electronic dance music [which] borrows from Witch House, Chiptune, Drum & Bass and southern rap" overdubbed with various dolphin-like sounds (Stehlik 2012).

Ultimately, the trend amounts to "a whimsical style that mashes together cartoonish aquatic themes, rave culture and nostalgia for '90s Internet imagery", and gained momentum on social media in the 2010s. Although most researchers garnered the seapunk scene as the first subcultural style to predominantly take shape on the Internet, mostly as a joke, this microgenre sparked real-life seapunk-themed parties and performances by various artists such as Zombelle, who played in Williamsburg's first Seapunk Alien Disco Indie Rave. The trend lacked critical acclaim and did not seem to promote any specific ideals, but it did manage to resemble some of punk's DIY attitude and its fanzines' style of collaging various visually appealing images as signifiers. Still, the pervasive tone of the phenomenon is one of an ironic, yet very much self-aware attitude. A gradual diffusion of the micro-subculture and some of its elements appeared to trickle down even into mainstream artists' performance and/or visual style, thus provoking early followers of the trend to claim it already dead "MERMAIDS ARE NOT SEAPUNK #tropiganda!".

However, this initially ideologically free ethos of both seapunk and synthwave gradually shifted the discourse surrounding the vaporwave genre, said to have taken its name from the term "vaporware"[12], as the name used for widely advertised products by tech companies that never become available to the public. Furthermore, the myriad different iterations of the vaporwave subgenres are seen as offering an ironic critique of capitalist and consumer culture in both content and form, blending a rather specific brand of electronic music with repurposed elements of sampled and highly distorted famous pop songs and smooth jazz tunes from the '80s and '90s, muzak, and elements of Japanese city-pop and '80s synths (McLeod 2018). Visually, its markers are easily observable in contemporary Internet trends, fashion, and music videos: pixelated texts and images, '90s videogame

12. "Vaporware", *Merriam-Webster* dictionary, *https://www.merriamwebster.com/dictionary/vaporware*. Accessed 7 July 2024.

design, outdated versions of the Microsoft logo, Japanese iconography reminiscent of Japan's economic boom of the late '80s and '90s, elements of corporate culture, alternating with images of Greek and Roman busts and statues in pastel blues and pinks, or in bright neon colors.

Interestingly enough, the vaporwave genre seems to have surpassed the status of just another passing Internet trend, since the abovementioned elements have permeated contemporary design styles, *Pantone*[13] declaring Peach Fuzz the color of 2024, Magenta the color of 2023, Very Peri (purple) the color of 2022, Illuminating Yellow the color of 2021, and the list goes on to include blue, ultraviolet and coral, with 2016 being the year of both pastel Rose Quartz and light blue Serenity. Moreover, according to Google Trends, the year 2016 doubled as the peak of Google searches for the term "vaporwave", the spike largely increasing from July 2016 and slightly decreasing over time until April 2022. Even though well-known vaporwave artists such as Vektroid, Daniel Lopatin, 猫 シ Corp. (Cat System Corp.), Blank Banshee, James Ferraro, and Skylar Spence have emerged mostly around the 2010s, with newcomers being quite rare, a notable occurrence is the current YouTube presence of several channels dedicated to only serving vaporwave music on a 24/7 basis (Smile Machine Music, ParmaSean), alongside famed Lofi Girl channel that is directly recommended by the YouTube algorithm when in search of vaporwave music. The channel was launched in 2015 and self-describes as offering "music for all situations with the 24/7 radios published on Lofi Girl · lofi hip hop radio - beats to relax/study to · synthwave radio - beats to chill". Clearly, the fans of these communities are well aware of the many cross-connections between the genres and subgenres. Furthermore, the latest YouTube channel, *chyllvester*, catering to the vaporwave genre under the guise of compiling collages of '90s weather reports, and '80s and '90s-inspired snippets of Christmas commercials, as well as the latest offshoot of the vaporwave genre, *officewave*, popularized by channel *baby.murcielaga*, launched as recently as April 2024, manage to amass views in the tens of thousands with each new release.

13. "Color of The Year." Pantone, *https://www.pantone.com/articles/color-of-the-year*. Accessed June 30, 2024.

Surprisingly, *baby.murcielaga* has managed to acquire more than 3 million YouTube views as of yet.

Visually, the 2024 vaporwave content largely remains the same, with pastel-infused images of corporate office work, shots of nighttime Los Angeles, tropical themes highlighting female figures working late hours in the office or drifting in Tokyo. The most popular clips are termed in the iconic spaced out capitalised words like "A E S T H E T I C", "C O R P O R A T E B U S I N E S S 1987", or simply "C Y B E R W A V E", and "It's summer 1989 and you're cruising in Los Angeles". Comments are usually in the hundreds, most fans stating the deep sense of nostalgia for the "golden years" of the '90s that the content seems to be imbued with. User @ lofiontheninghtmusic comments "I'm sure the lofi community is the safest place on YouTube. I don't want much, I just want the person reading this to be healthy, happy and loved". Commenter @mmlpcompany6731 added:

> Walking to the store with a dollar, and coming back with a juice jug, cosmic brownie, oatmeal cookie, and a bag of Doritos.. last day of school was yesterday and I still have all the candy from the going away parties that our class threw. Coming back home to my playstation 1, nintendo64 and gameboy advance with nothing but a mountain of candy and all the time in the world… @Jean_1999 replied "Those were the Days. The best Days in human his[t]ory". @ashwinantony7140 states "Born in 1985 - Bicycles, by lanes, walkman and the death of Innocence - I treasure the ‚90s", while @aarronvanburen8612 calls to action by adding: 1993 BABIES UNITE!! (...) We are the last generation to grow up without cell phones (at least not until we were approaching high school). We actually know how to survive if the Internet goes down. ‚93 is all I've ever wanted to be.

Discussion threads on the YouTube channel playing vaporwave music over clips from the weather channel ring very much the same. User @hurlicane56 stated that "it's not just a music genre. It's a place and a feeling",

while @samimo1979 explains "adult-hood is watching this at 2am, staring into the screen, dissociating and reminiscing about how things used to be".

It becomes quite clear from the few examples above that the vaporwave genre has not died out and that one of its functions is to offer fans a form of escape into an idealized past, one that was perhaps not even fully experienced (anemoia), proving Borgielo and Berghman's (2022) explanation that these Internet aesthetics function as "detailed ways of doing", with a distinct social feature, expanding much beyond style genres, which are mainly "systems of aesthetic categorization" specific to subcultural genres of earlier decades. These current modes of expression are mostly lived out in digital landscapes and have few ways of transgressing the boundaries of real life more than participating in the liminal consumption of these cultural artifacts (Papuc 2022) through passive behaviors (redistribution of content on social media platforms via comments, sharing, retweeting, liking, or simply viewing content), or through the active roles of creation and subsequent distribution of content (El Ouirdi, et al. 2014, 121-122). However, one notable exception from the rule is the now-defunct Private Suite Magazine, a community-based zine meant to archive "all things vaporwave", reaching a number of fourteen issues that got discontinued on September 21st, 2020.

Thus, the act of community building characteristic of the subcultures of previous decades has simply shifted onto online platforms, forums, visual mood boards, and curation practices which seem to help soothe anxieties in the face of current sociopolitical challenges by providing a form of escapism into an idealized or imagined past. Moreover, since one recurrent function provided by numerous Internet aesthetics appears to truly embody Giolo and Berghman's (2023) use of acting as "toolkits" for individuation and sense-making, the emerging identities partaking in these cultural creations simultaneously appear to portray new emerging forms of subjectivity characteristic to global capitalism (Gog and Simionca 2020).

These forms of identity can be understood as closely related and built upon the sought-after traits promoted by the neoliberalist work ethic, which in turn influences the competencies valued by employers and

which academia seeks to enforce as well, through competitive strategies meant to attract large bodies of students to sustain the economic and cultural capital of these institutions. In essence, those who are in possession of economic power and social prestige have, in theory at least, the means to influence the distribution of cultural capital too (Bourdieu 1986). Of course, when correlated with the global expansion over the last decades of English in both sociocultural and political spheres around the world, paired with the current transition to Web 3.0, as well as the current AI boom, the modes of digital communication and connection have affected modes of individuation and identity expression. These transformations had already been foreseen by sociolinguists, especially with the advancement of Kira Hall's (2014) notion of "hypersubjectivities" embedded in clusters of "superdiversity" (Jørgensen and Ag 2012), all influenced by accelerated trends in migration and changes in language use through the introduction of Bloammert's now famous concept of "transmobility" (2010).

Ultimately, core tenets of the neoliberal framework envision individuals as fully capable and empowered, hence the emphasis on developing one's entrepreneurial self. Inner strength and resourcefulness are framed as aspects of oneself that can be easily deployed if one believes it possible, especially when this core self is shrouded in an inalienable sense of authenticity. The individual self thus becomes, in the neoliberal framework, one that is capable of reaching freedom, wellbeing and prosperity through efficiency, individualism and competition (Gog and Simionca 2020). Naturally, it becomes evident how the micro and the cultural become heavily entwined with macro-economic, capitalistic forces, and human capital an essential driving force of neoliberal governing bodies (Gog and Simionca 2020, 97). This is also how individual productivity reigns supreme in the workplace, in academia, and on social media to the gradual displacement and erasure of the importance of relying on community and systemic organization. Thus, this ultimate sense of freedom seems to enslave the individual to a never-ending quest for self-optimization but not liberate them from societal pressures.

When pairing these modes of being with the financial crises, threat of climate change and gradual loss of home ownership among younger generations, it comes as no surprise that the trend of "quiet quitting" (Galanis et al. 2023), alongside the critique against the proliferation of certain social media personas that thrived on constructing an idealized way of living which glamorized self-regulated productivity over everything else (see the "That Girl trend", "girlboss feminism", the hype surrounding the "passion economy", in addition to the "I no longer dream of labor" movement, and many others) signal a state of confusion lamented by the Millennials, a state of affairs alluded to and ridiculed in the Gen Z-Millennial-Boomer "culture wars". A meta-review of the research carried out over the last two decades on the psychological profile of the Millennial generation (Badar and Lasthuizen 2023) concludes that the following traits and tendencies can be generally ascribed to individuals part of this segment of the population, resulting from collective pressures and socioeconomic circumstances: "Self-esteem, Narcissism, External locus of control, Anxiety, Depression, Psychological empowerment, and Psychological flexibility" (Table 5, Badar and Lasthuizen 2023). Research on Gen Z on the other hand, the generation born between the mid-1990s to early 2010s, also dubbed as the first "digital natives", points to a profile of highly ambitious and self-confident individuals, interested in achieving work-life balance in a meaningful job/career, easily adaptable to change, welcoming of opportunities, conscious of consumption practices and generally open to all modes of self-expression (Benítez-Márquez et al. 2022). Many of these traits seem to be the driver behind younger generations' approach to social media usage, content creation and consumption.

In fact, the phrase "Influencer culture" is now an overused descriptor of the marketing strategies used by individuals over social media for promoting content that is usually sponsored by various services and products. To do so, most influencers and content creators become adept at performing authenticity, a complex form of self-presentation of which, especially teenagers between the ages of 13 and 18 seem to be highly aware of and particularly value (Darr and Doss 2022). However, creating a sense of online

authenticity becomes complicated by the fact that individual identity can be manipulated in so many different ways not only in real-life encounters, restricted by sociocultural and embedded expectations of different social settings (Goffman 1959), but in online settings as well, networks that transcend the usual spatial and temporal restrictions of face-to-face interactions. Anonymity can both hinder or reveal true aspects of one's intentions and personality, while the phenomenon of "context collapse" (Darr and Doss 2022) muddles the boundaries between the access of different social groups to distinct social roles embodied by individuals, an aspect which diminishes the level of control over how much 'authenticity' one feels comfortable in revealing. For these reasons, Darr and Doss highlight the fact that many teenagers in the U.S. resort to creating "Finstas", fake Instagram profiles which allow them to more freely express opinions, preferences and dislikes, without the need to restrict audiences' access to posts, as it seems to happen in the case of teenagers using Facebook or Twitter, spaces where family members, friends, colleagues, acquaintances, and strangers are all seemingly connected (1). In fact, research clearly indicates teenagers being well aware of the differences between their online and offline selves (Binns 2014; Davis 2014) teens predominantly making use of Instagram, WhatsApp and TikTok, and to a lesser degree Facebook, for self-disclosure and maintaining social connections (Dixon 2024b)[14].

Regarding content creation and redistribution of both short-form and long-form clips, as well as the practice of adding comments and directly interacting with other individuals sharing similar preferences, especially self-curated lists of cultural artifacts, small online communities start aggregating around particular themes that can witness abrupt upsurges in popularity via viral trends. In Terry Nguyen's words, in the article "Trends are Dead", a Vox former reporter explains that these strategies amount to "an attempt at repackaging ideas, attitudes, and aesthetics into identifiable trends — something that can be capitalized on for attention or profit, comprehended, and widely consumed by a mass audience" (2022). On the one hand, adding a distinctive name, a label to these themes helps create a

14. "Global Daily Social Media Usage 2024." *Statista*, *https://www.statista.com/statistics/433871/daily-social-media-usage-worldwide/*. Accessed 29 June 2024.

sense of identification and legitimacy to the growing communities around them. On the other hand, it is the same fixation with labeling these trends that appeals to companies trying to profit from "such fleeting fancies", by encouraging fast, mass consumption, all for the sake of declaring one's fleeting alternative identity (Nguyen 2022, Saito 2018). This in turn, might also explain the rise of Influencer culture and the hypersubjective/hyper-individualised modes of communication forged between content creators and consumers, since online multimodal communication is frequently characterized by asynchronous lines of communication that favor editing in real-time over responding in real-time, delayed comments/reactions to published content, flexible and collaborative creation of meaning and interpretations, all of which ensure the perpetually dynamic character of a form of communication that may not reach its intended audience as planned and that may not fully strike a consensus on a destined meaning (Bernd 2022).

In actuality, the relatively transitory fast-fashion cycles and associated aesthetics count towards another distinction between the current-day digital subcultures and the ones from previous decades. The emphasis is no longer placed so heavily on establishing allegiance to one and only one subculture, as used to be the case in the mods versus rocker debates, the new wave versus post-punk scenes, the grunge versus electronic dance music of the '90s, the indie versus boyband/pop mainstream genres of the 2000s and early 2010s. It would seem, today, that the Millennials are representative of arguably the last generation to have experienced growing up and individuating in a world without digital devices and the Internet, meaning that the weight of subcultural belonging felt differently for members of the following generation, the Gen-Zers. In this case, digital aesthetics, easily accessible and ripe for the taking, since they mostly require dabbling in activities entailing merely listing preferences, joining forums, liking and writing comments, sharing outfit ideas and buying clothing items from (unfortunately) fast-fashion retailers that provide access to cheap cultural artifacts, provide a sort of playground for identity construction. This playground is much more forgiving and allows for much more freedom

from the restrictions imposed by other community members in terms of gatekeeping and requiring proof of membership allegiance to certain trends (Nguyen 2022). This phenomenon is also signaled by the primary discursive means of claiming (temporary) membership to these digital neotribes, which mainly amounts to exemplification, listings and individualized curation practices through "descriptive texts, linkage texts, and materials" (Giolo and Berghman 2023). Decisions to label a specific theme under the guise of a particular moniker to which the suffix '-core' becomes attached is another example of how micro-level activity can become influential over meso- and macro-scales through social convergence and emotional contagion. With repeated exposure to relatively similar interpretations of the activities performed by these overlapping networked micro-communities, they become multi-layered semiotic repertoires, to borrow Pennycook's (2017) terminology, which become the breeding ground of "hyperindividuality", these microcultural aggregates becoming embedded in their own microcosms and linguacultures (Cotrău, Cotoc and Papuc 2021). Best highlighting for the remaining major characteristics of Internet aesthetics, as revealed in Giolo and Berghman's work, is the cottagecore fandom, one of the most prominent pandemic-induced subcultures, alongside the indie sleaze revival of the last few years, both representative of what seems to be a communal sense of nostalgia for a lost paradise.

Lastly, to illustrate the "loose classificatory" nature of these digital trends, we shall briefly explore a more recent revival of another micro-subculture that emerged only in online spaces in the early 2000s, the one subcultural category listed on both worldwide and U.S. based lists of most frequent web searches of 2023 — nightcore. The term is used to reference a particular music style of sped-up trance tracks. The origin of the scene is attributed to the work of two Norwegian teenagers, Thomas Nilsen and Steffen Soderholm, who in 2002 released five albums of their novel approach to trance music under the band name Nightcore (Winston 2017). Apparently, most of their tracks disappeared almost entirely from the Internet, with the removal of their website in 2003, only to later resurface on YouTube and the now defunct LimeWire, a free of charge peer-to-peer

file sharing website (for mostly pirated music). The movement began growing with other trance and Eurodance songs modified in a similar style getting posted on YouTube, paired with juxtaposed visual collages of Japanese-inspired animations. Stylistically, the term as used today includes "the production of hyper-fast dance-pop music with pitched-up vocals", sampled from mainstream pop, rock, and electronic dance music (EDM), "time stretched and pitch-shifted upwards (...) with additional original production" (Winston 2017, 2). This particular microgenre seems to emphasize several traits similar to the above-detailed vaporwave genre, the closely related synthwave trend: it encourages fans' unrestricted creativity by making use of already existing cultural artifacts and repurposing them to arrive at different symbolic connotations. The genre is theoretically easily accessible to anyone with an interest in this particular music style (although purists have started claiming that anything that is not trance-based cannot be considered "true" Nightcore), fans do not require having extensively developed skills in music production or in creating the visual content associated to the genre. In terms of recurrent themes and motifs, Nightcore elements entail embracing fast-paced music, a fascination with technology, cyberpunk-inspired Japanese visualscapes that produce both dystopian and a soothing calming effect (the common affect-driven consumption being associated with the vaporwave genre too). Interestingly, a recent revival of the microculture seems to be underway with comments in the thousands attached to Nightcore remixes posted on YouTube as of 2023. Fans describe the music as producing an intense sense of nostalgia for fans who grew up with the style, similar to connotations attributed to vaporwave, albeit a sense of nostalgia for the lost promises of capitalism at the turn of the Millennium and on the brink of the technological revolution of Web 2.0 (Killeen 2018). In a similar vein, the "Youtube Culture and Trends Report 2023" exemplifies synthwave as a frequently resorted to style of streamed content by the popular channel Lofi Girl to create a "trending moment". Thus, electronic-based music seems to dominate the numerous taste communities residing on YouTube.

Concluding remarks

Ultimately, the Internet aesthetics of today, as well as the digital scenes of the 2000s, and 2010s, reflect the changing attitudes towards ever-evolving technology. The swift change of access to means of cultural production and the current challenges of transitioning towards Web 3.0 can be held responsible for both collective and individual efforts to integrate our sense of self in the process of identity construction and management, given the almost unrestricted sense of access to knowledge, culture, and communication with people across the world. This transition from local to global was permitted not only by the fact that the Internet has become one of the great equalizers of our times, but because the language of this shift has turned out to be the language of the American-bred (sub)cultures, countercultures and their affiliated ideals.

In stark contrast to the subcultures of the pre-millennial decades, traditional subcultural genres have been repurposed in the form of Internet aesthetics, core genres, and rapidly shifting trends, all indicative of the more malleable distinctions between them and the instability of the clusters around which communities are created and dissipate over the Internet. On the one hand, a very broadly defined mainstream culture has turned into a uniform monoculture of sorts, heavily regulated by algorithm-fed preferences and streaming services that create filter bubbles and echo-chambers of compartmentalized tastes. On the other hand, this extreme subjectivization of both individual cultural creation and consumption has given free rein to recuperating and creating a more stable sense of self in our crisis-defined times through rapidly changing cycles of subcultural creation. The act of labeling these forms of expression by either using the general umbrella-term "aesthetic" or adding the suffix "-core" to a genre-defining designator, offers the great variety of existing online taste communities a sense of legitimacy. However, the same act also gives life to a chaotic taxonomy of genres and subgenres, much more difficult to sharply delineate since the primary methods used for claiming group membership of these micro-communities are mostly through curatorial practices that entail listing preferences, cultural artifacts, materialities and

particular activities that have to be subjectively experienced. Only thus are loosely defined semiotic repertoires created inside micro-communities that start coalescing.

Finally, Internet aesthetics offer the possibility of those partaking in their consumption and creation to use them as toolkits serving the articulation of a more coherent self-image and the portrayal of said image to other subcultural consumers. The transitory and highly interpretable connotations of these genres allow individuals to reconcile contradictory emotional states, ambivalent attitudes, and opposing personality traits by engaging in acts of liminal consumption and creation (Papuc 2022). Seeing these modes of personal expression as helpful in the process of aligning lived experiences (Giolo and Berghman 2023) with those depicted by and imagined through Internet aesthetics helps young people piece together, in reinterpreted collages, a wide array of subcultural and countercultural elements, in a manner that may provide a sense of internal coherence through sublimation.

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Urbochrematonyms as Group Identity Construction Mechanisms for Neotribes

ANAMARIA RADU, ALEXANDRA COTOC

Abstract. Our study delves into the intricate dynamics of language and culture in the context of youth subcultures by exploring urbochrematonyms and slogans, and their role in shaping group identities and genius loci, giving them a unique character. The paper highlights the phenomenon of new tribalism, a modern form of social organization, and its manifestation in the youth subcultures of Cluj-Napoca, often referred to as the Silicon Valley of Europe. The study examines several linguistic mechanisms to create (urbo) chrematonyms and the transformations reflecting the changing sociocultural realities of matching neotribes and their consumption patterns. The research further investigates the interplay between the glocal and the global in the construction of the urban dynamics of neotribes. It underscores how local cultural elements are intertwined with global influences, creating a unique linguistic landscape that is both globally informed and locally rooted. The study contributes to the understanding of how language, as a cultural artifact, is instrumental in constructing group identities. It provides valuable insights into the mechanisms of identity construction in youth subcultures, offering a fresh perspective on the dynamic relationship between language, culture, and identity.

Keywords: *urbochrematonyms, transonymization, neotribes, genius loci, consumer tribes*

> *"Your body is not a temple, it's an amusement park.*
> *Enjoy the ride".*
>
> Anthony Bourdain

Introduction

The current study is part of ongoing research in the onomastic field of chrematonyms (see Cotoc and Radu 2016; Radu and Cotoc 2016; Radu 2020). It introduces urbochrematonyms as a novel subcategory in the onomastic field, and it presents several linguistic mechanisms for creating them (transonymization, multi-transonymization, onymization, backcronyms, acronyms and odonyms). At the same time, it connects this onomastic category to the neotribes in Cluj-Napoca, Romania. This city, also known as the Silicon Valley of Europe, has become a preferred destination for both Romanian and foreign tourists. In this urban landscape, youth subcultures and neotribes play a significant part in developing tastes, trends, and creative configurations of places, often acting as incubators of style, language, culture. In the context of global participation and transformation, we focus both on youth subcultures and neotribes, these two categories being formed around shared interests and providing a sense of belonging. However, neotribes reflect more accurately the dynamic society because they are fluid, they are more receptive to new trends or events and they can always broaden their preferences, and usually have an impact on consumption patterns and preferences. Therefore, neotribes are more susceptible to becoming consumer tribes and sometimes they are consumer tribes by default, who are not defined by geographical boundaries but by shared behaviours, brands and tastes. This leads to a vibrant life in the local scene of Cluj-Napoca where (young) people are also in search of places that they frequent with a particular regularity, having the desire to be part of communities and groups that match their interests and identities. As such, the places are very well-represented by multifaceted

genius loci or atmosphere of the place and this is relevant in the choice and the development of urbochrematonyms in this urban area. Consumer tribes can influence the trends of creating urbochrematonyms as shared consumption patterns lead to the concentration of restaurants, cafes, pubs and bars which are interconnected with the genius loci, each shaping, and at the same time being shaped by the other in this dynamic landscape of urban consumer culture.

In order to check the interconnectedness between restaurants, cafes, pubs and bars and the genius loci of the urban landscape of Cluj-Napoca, we used crowdsourcing techniques to properly understand the dynamics of neotribes: we applied a questionnaire to analyse the popularity of urbochrematonyms, collecting data on how widely these place names are used and recognised by the neotribes. We also had follow-up discussions, and we received feedback from the respondents to the questionnaire and, in this way, we reconfigured our research to embed relevant aspects that emerged. Hence, we decided to explore the relationship between the urbochermatonyms and the concept of genius loci or the spirit of a place[1], which revealed how commercial preferences contribute to the atmosphere of an urban area, such as Cluj. The crowdsourcing techniques used were key tools for understanding the complex interplay between the urban nomenclature of Cluj-Napoca, place identity and consumer behaviour, and provided insights into how shared consumption patterns reflect the identities of neotribes, configured as consumer tribes in the context of our study.

Urbochrematonyms and the Youth Subcultures

Considering that “language and culture are better thought of as a single unit: languaculture” (Tannen 2006, 343), (urbo)chrematonyms stand as an example of onymic category that reflects the complex relation between language and culture in networked societies in which global and local cultural elements are mixed. While chrematonyms are “names of cultural

1. The concept was suggested in an informal discussion by our colleague, Oana Iulia Enășel, Cultural Marketing Specialist, Phd.

enterprises, names of institutions, names of companies, names of vehicles and names of products" (Guz 2020), urbochrematonyms narrow down the focus of chrematonyms by situating them only in urban places, thus viewing them as static due to their precise geographical location and their existence being associated with a building or a place (Cotoc and Radu 2016, 630). Researchers even consider them to be permanent places in the urban landscape (Dombrowski 2015, 31) – even though permanency might be debated or even contested, given the dynamic and fluctuating context created by digital media and society (Lindgren 2017). In this line of thought, the urban landscape is linguistically constructed through the use of language to denote particular places and, in turn, place names show a toponymic landscape (Jaroslav 2019, 6) indicative of society as a whole and the overall preferences, needs, and interests of individuals. On this note, "the way we speak and what we eat is not based on individual choice only, but also on the society we live in and the place in society we occupy or wish to occupy. Both food and language have an intricate connection to power: in the world at large (the distribution of meat, of land) as well as in smaller groups" (Gerhardt 2013, 4).

The groups and the toponymic landscape around each individual create linguistic constellations that interact with other people's constellations, creating nodes that show various group identities. Besides the existing nodes, all the recommendations of places that capture people's attention reconfigure or have the potential to reconfigure identities in correlation with popular locations. Urbochrematonyms reflect this reality to a great extent and they also show that "people are different or the same depending on what they eat and how they speak". In other words "both food and language are used to maintain and create human relationships" (Gerhardt 2014, 3).

Locations, in general, and even more so popular ones, contribute to the creation of *genius loci* because "every place has its own unique qualities, not only in terms of its physical makeup, but of how it is perceived, so it ought to be (but far too often is not) the responsibilities of the architect or landscape-designer to be sensitive to those unique qualities, to

enhance them rather than to destroy them"[2]. To this definition, we add that *genius loci* refers to "the spirit of the place" (Vecco 2020, 3) and it represents the unique quality or ambiance of a location in relation with the mental image that it creates. Moreover, "places and their genius loci are to be considered as a holistic entity and reality, with a specific tangible and intangible identity that is perceived and experienced by humans" (Idem, 1). In the case of urban places, we mention that these places and locations are labelled with urbochrematonyms which are indicative of particular genius loci and, in many cases, of (youth) subculture identities and/or neotribes.

Youth subcultures are traditionally and "broadly defined as meaning and action systems created by young people sharing similar interests, preferences and life-chances" (Bell 2013) and they are the most representative social group in terms of their social life because of their pursuit and establishment of a specific ambiance in the locations and places they visit in their free time. Subcultures can be identified through productive, consumptive behaviours and observable vernacular practices (Williams 2023) that unfold in various locations labelled with suggestive urbochrematonyms. Different subculture identities are manifested and constructed around these onymic categories with strong symbolic power. These terms serve as markers of belonging to particular subcultural groups, and they also shape how members identify themselves and others, also influencing their behaviours, interests, values, and interactions. Additionally, we argue that these terms combine with cultural elements like the use of distinctive fashion styles, musical preferences, and linguistic codes to construct subcultural identities that are recognisable and meaningful to those within the group, but also outside the group.

The concept of *permanency*, inherent in the definition of urbochrematonyms, can also define subcultures and identity/identities in their traditional conceptualisation, which requires this feature in order to ensure recognisability. However, in a digital society, the concept of *permanency* is reconfigured, showing more fluidity and change within subcultures

2. *https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095847893*

and indicating rapid evolution and adaptation of subcultural identities and urbochrematonyms. In contrast to subculture and traditional tribes, where people are born into a group, neotribes are groups of people who are together by choice for a particular timespan, in a particular setting, and having a specific reason and similar tastes. Neotribes are also linked to the field of consumer research under the label *consumer tribes* (Diaz Ruiz et al 2020,1001). It is important to note that "consumer tribes rarely consume brands and products – even the most mundane ones– without adding to them, grappling with them, blending them with their own lives and altering them" (Cova, Kozinets 2007, 3).

We argue that different subcultures could come together as part of the same neotribes as neotribes are a matter of taste, lifestyle, ambiance, and state of mind, contributing to the creation of genius loci: "the tribe is without the rigidity of the forms of organization with which we are familiar, it refers more to a certain ambience, a state of mind, and is preferably to be expressed through lifestyles that favour appearance and form" (Maffesoli 1996, 98). In this conceptualisation, "lifestyle" is seen as the choice of "certain commodities and patterns of consumption" and the articulation of "these cultural resources as modes of personal expression" (Bennett 1999, 607). Bennet also notes that lifestyles are not indicative of specific social classes, as individuals might select and adopt lifestyles not matching their social class. This leads to the creation of tribal identities, which "serve to illustrate the temporal nature of collective identities in modern consumer society as individuals continually move between different sites of collective expression and 'reconstruct' themselves accordingly" (Bennett 1999, 606).

Decoding Urbochermatonyms: The Blueprint of Urban Identity and Neotribes

The urbochrematonyms, conceptualised at first glance as fixed and stable markers of the identity of neotribes, can be reinterpreted and redefined

to match evolving marketing needs. One process that exemplifies the dynamic nature of urbochrematonyms is illustrated by transonymization, understood as a "secondary use as names of institutions, shops, restaurants, schools, sports associations and facilities, bars and coffee shops, cemeteries, and so on" (Katarina Lozić Knezović, Marasović-Alujević 2017, 2).

An example of transonymization is the name of *Cafe Bulgakov,* in Cluj-Napoca, which takes its name from the proper noun denoting the famous Russian writer Mikhail Bulgakov. Using the proper name as an urbochrematonym, allows the owners to construct an engaging narrative and identity, as can be seen on the site:

> There isn't **a community in Cluj** where you haven't heard at least once the saying: **"See you at Bulgakov?"** Since 2002, Bulgakov Café has been the centre of Hungarian cultural life in Transylvania, seasoned with the taste of traditional homemade food. **A place where literature meets gastronomy, music and club life**. The place where you can enjoy the most important events of the Transylvanian cultural life, while tasting the amazing dishes of the Transylvanian cuisine and sipping a glass of wine from carefully selected varieties from the Carpathian Basin. Come visit us, see you at Bulgakov![3] [our emphasis].

The use of the urbochrematonym *Bulgakov* fosters a sense of collective identity, thereby attracting a certain clientele: those interested in literature and Transylvanian cuisine and literature. This combination of cultural elements is indicative of specific communities, but it also emphasises the restaurant's long-standing tradition and uniqueness.

In other cases, the transonymization process is very versatile as it does not take place only between two objects, the original one and the newly named one. Frequently, a place name with high naming potential is transferred several times to name different objects (Jaroslav 2019, 6). One such example from the local scenario of Cluj-Napoca is illustrated

3. *https://cafebulgakov.ro/en/home-english/*

by the urbochrematonym *Klausen* which is taken from the German name, Klausenburg, for the Romanian city of Cluj-Napoca, which we consider to be a case of inter-lingual transonymisation because it takes its name from a German toponym denoting a city in Romania. Regarding this urbochrematonym, there are two other different locations using the same oikonym – a specific type of of tononym denoting its settlement or its part[4] (from the Greek word οἶκος, home) (*Klausen*): *Klausen Pubhouse* and *Klausen Burger Brewpub & Rooftop*. The latter is wordplay, making one think both about the German noun phrase Klausen Burger, meaning resident of Cluj-Napoca, and about a burger, meaning food. Moreover, Klausen is also used to denote a shop for lighting systems (*Klausen. For a bright life*), thus being used to denote a location serving an entirely different purpose.

Transonymization can also be a multi-layered process:

> [...] if one focuses on a particular place name spreading from the spatial and temporal perspectives, the multi-transonymization process can be regarded as the expression of the information / spatial / value distribution represented by the original place name; a spatial appearance of a particular name caused by the transonymization process creates a visible border of the area connected with a particular value. (Jaroslav 2019, 3).

An example of multi-transonymization process is illustrated by the urbochrematonym *Ciao New York* (a restaurant in Cluj-Napoca), which is formed by a mixture between the Italian greeting *ciao* and the name referring to an American city, thus showing fusion in terms of *genius loci* and culinary experience.

Another relevant category of urbochrematonyms that we identified on the local scene of Cluj-Napoca is represented by onymization, which makes reference to proper nouns derived or originating from common names. One such example is the urbocrematonym *Ibric*, a coffee shop in Cluj-Napoca. The name is taken from a common name (Turkish copper

4. *https://www.powerthesaurus.org/oikonym/definitions*

kettle[5]) and transformed into a proper name. Another example is *Atelier* (*Café by day, Bar by night, Live concerts venue, Doggo spot*)[6]: a common noun showing a place equipped with tools or machinery in which organised craft or industrial work is carried out[7]. We also mention Zama (a restaurant with Transylvanian cuisine, coming from *soup* in dialect), Roata (a traditional Romanian restaurant, coming from the Romanian common noun *wheel*), Sisters (a coffee shop, coming from the English common noun).

The onymization process originates in concrete nouns (see the examples in the previous paragraph), but also in abstract nouns. Some examples include Samsara - "in Hinduism and Buddhism, *the cycle* (= repeated connected events) of birth, death, and rebirth"[8], Euphoria, Insomnia, Meron[9], meaning *days* in the Greek language, Yume[10] meaning *dream*.

Another innovative mechanism of creating urbochrematonyms is represented by the use of backronyms and/or acronyms. Both these onomastic categories are formed by the use of initials or parts of words to create a new name, but there is a difference between them: while an acronym means "abbreviation formed from the initial letter or group of letters of two or more words"[11], a backronym "is a phrase created from an actual word as if it was an acronym. For example, the phrase "clever agile traveler" is one possible backronym you could form from the word *cat*"[12]. A relevant example for our study is DOT, one possible backronym filled out with the phrase *district of toast*. This backcronym is reinforced by the description on the site of DOT, the food establishment in Cluj, the owners aiming to create special genius loci with an intimate atmosphere and close connection with the clientele:

5. *https://www.wordreference.com/roen/ibric*
6. *https://www.instagram.com/ateliercafecluj/*
7. *https://dexonline.ro/definitie/atelier*
8. *https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/samsara?q=Samsara*
9. *https://www.meron.coffee/our-story/*
10. *https://jlptsensei.com/learn-japanese-vocabulary/%E5%A4%A2-%E3%82%86%E3%82%81-yume-meaning/?utm_content=cmp-true*
11. *https://www.britannica.com/topic/acronym*
12. *https://www.dictionary.com/browse/backronym*

> *Hi. We're dot and we've made it our mission to toast every toast we serve and every drink we make. We believe that you don't need a specific time to celebrate or honor something. We believe that birthdays, christenings and anniversaries are not the only moments that should be celebrated. We believe that every day can have its own moment of celebration. And that's up to us. We love what we do and we would like to see our gangs growing each day. We're really up to tricks. Oh, and we have all sorts of fixations, but more on that later.*[13] [our translation]

NOA, Nest of Angels, a club in Cluj-Napoca, is an example of a backronym targeting youth subcultures. The backronym, together with the description on Instagram ("Probably the coolest club in Transilvania Disco retro club Cluj-Napoca Str. Republicii 109 ; See you every FRY and SAT"[14]), the description on their site ("What we stand for is what makes our club different than others: a mix of music, great food, good cocktails, and amazing people"[15]), and their logo (a pair of wings), represent the key strategies to make a particular youth subculture group feel at home (*nest*) and supernatural (*angels*), at the same time promising an out-of-this-world experience.

Memo 10 is a restaurant located on Memorandumului Street in Cluj-Napoca. *10* refers to the street number and *Memo* is short for Memorandumului, the street name, the version used by locals to refer to the street and its locations. This makes Memo 10 an odonym derived from the street name, signifying both the location and the business itself, connecting the restaurant to its geographical context in a meaningful way.

13. "Bună. Noi suntem dot și ne-am propus să facem un toast la fiecare toast pe care-l servim și la fiecare băutură pe care-o preparăm. Credem că nu-i nevoie de un moment anume să sărbătorești sau să cinstești ceva. Credem că nu doar zilele de naștere, botezurile și aniversările trebuie sărbătorite. Credem că fiecare zi poate să aibă propriul moment de sărbătorire. Și asta ține doar de noi. Ne place mult ceea ce facem și am vrea să ne vedem în fiecare zi în gășți cât mai mari. Suntem pușí pe șotii, rău de tot. Aaaa. Și avem tot felul de fixuri, dar despre asta vorbim mai târziu."

14. *https://www.instagram.com/club.noacluj/?hl=en*

15. *https://clubnoa.ro/*

Urbochrematonyms and Neotribes

The use of urbochrematonyms is associated with subcultures and/or neotribes in urban spaces because the way in which urbochrematonyms are perceived by locals reveals the individuals' affiliation with specific subcultures and/or neotribes. This is also indicative of the way in which locals perceive their own identity as being a collective and relational concept within the urban constellation.

In order to check the complex relation between urbochrematonyms and subcultures, respectively, neotribes, we applied a questionnaire focusing on names, logos and slogans in Cluj-Napoca. The questionnaire was in Romanian, and it targeted inhabitants in the area (people born and raised in the Cluj-Napoca area, students, and people who work in Cluj-Napoca).

The vast majority of the respondents are between 20-50 years old (41.7%: 31-40; 26%: 20-30; 20.8%: 41-50). We notice that their choice of the place and the food is strongly related not only to a purely pragmatic aspect, namely the quality and the price (78.1%), but also to the atmosphere (69.8%) and the regular clientele (29.2%), indicating that genius loci are an essential aspect that connects places and people. Our respondents are socially active, and they can offer valuable insight into how neotribes function and perform identities in the urban landscape of Cluj-Napoca.

According to our respondents' answers, in the vibrant heart of Cluj, the cafes that stand out due to their significant investment in their image and atmosphere and to the uniqueness of their design and the quality of their products are: Meron, Olivo, Panemar, Sisters, Narcofee, Tucano, Urania, Atelier (see Figure 1. below).

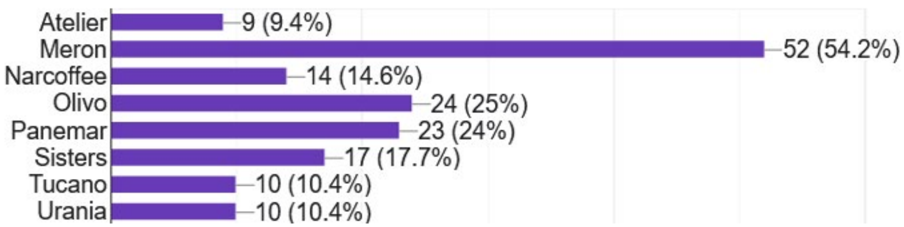


Fig. 1. Cafes

These cafes have become popular not just for their coffee, but also for the unique experience they offer to their customers. In this respect, we notice a preference for genius loci invoking the importance of artisanal drinks and the perfection in every brew. Local roasters are key to this culture, using their skills to create memorable coffee blends. The coffee culture in Cluj-Napoca has seen a significant evolution over the years, becoming a vibrant hub for coffee lovers. The urbochrematonyms and the slogans used are in line with the genius loci. For example: Meron - Home of Coffee, Olivo - Coffee Culture, Sisters - To Go or Not To Go coffee shop, Narcoffee - has recently been bought by Olivo, Urania - Social Hub, Atelier - liberté, fraternité, atelier. Regarding Atelier, one of the respondents says that:

> *Atelier - I have noticed how friends or acquaintances who do not frequent the place, especially in its evening version (when it becomes a bar, pub, club), do not correctly decode the statement „I spent many hours in Atelier". Almost without exception, I have been asked what workshop I held or attended. Atelier - the name fits the atmosphere and, I don't know if it's still the same, but they had pressed cardboard furniture and it really had a workshop/atelier feel* (our translation).

Going out for lunch or dinner in Cluj-Napoca, the top three restaurants chosen by the respondents are Bulgakov (38.5%), Marty (30.2%); Garlic (27.1%) (see Figure 2 below). These three places are well-known in Cluj-Napoca and attract locals and tourists alike through their genius loci. While Bulgakov and Marty have been an integral part of the town's atmosphere, with a 20-year tradition, Garlic emerges as a new entrant. Despite its novelty, Garlic brings a fresh perspective and vitality, invigorating the genius loci by using a cliché related to the legend of Dracula and vampires that people associate with Transylvania and adopting a playful strategy. The choice of slogans adds to the story around genius loci: the slogan chosen by Bulgakov, *See you at Bulgakov?*, could be considered a rhetorical question, rendering the idea of people gathering frequently in this place; Marty's

slogan *For the love of food*, contains a mimetic recreation of the English idiom *For the love of god* and replaces *god* with *food*, suggesting that in the gourmand world, food is as important as God; Garlic's slogan, *bites&tales*, shows the intricate relation between food and consumer tribes who come to this place not only to eat, but also to share (life)stories.

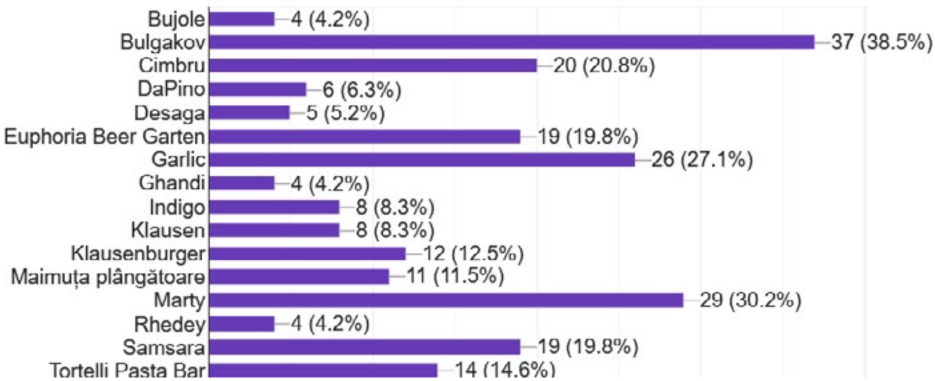


Fig. 2. Dinner or lunch

Eating out is also associated with a new trend in which people combine breakfast and lunch, thus organising their day according to a particular state of mind and even reflecting a particular lifestyle for new-tribes who adopt this ritual which is characteristic of the urban environment: "in a fast-paced world, brunch provides a time to slow down, savour good food, and enjoy the company of others. It fits perfectly into the lifestyle of modern urbanites who value experiences over strict meal schedules".[16] This leads to the creation of a brunch culture, which is more than just eggs and pancakes and this is reflected in the urbochrematonym of the two of the most popular brunch places in Cluj (see Figure 3 below): *Eggcetera* suggests that all dietary preferences are included in their menu, which makes it the perfect choice that values food, good company and taking time to enjoy both; the urbochrematonym *Nuka* is explained on a site dedicated to projects focusing on successful visual ideas for brand creation:

16. *https://dailyground.co/blog/the-rise-and-significance-of-brunch-culture-and-what-it-represents*

Before: a location in the center of Cluj, in a century-old building. After: nuka- bistro soul, wine / branding and visual identity: a friendly new brand, with a soft, nostalgic core. The vintage air of the place inspired us to come up with a warm, affectionate name :"nuka". The delicious ingredient from grandma's incredible cookies, the walnut kernel, reminds us of childhood games, comfortable sofas and favorite dishes. [...] Nuka Bistro is a nice, warm and nostalgic brand, one that you make friends with at first...bite. (*https://www.tdstudio.ro/en/project/nuka_bistro.html*)

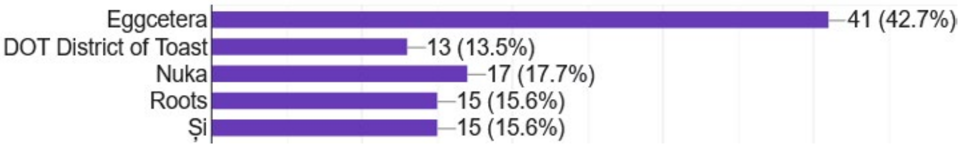


Fig. 3. Brunch

The choice of urbochrematonyms in the area of bars, pubs, clubs shows that Cluj-Napoca is "the 'capital' of Transylvania", having "a large student population and an arty vibe with excellent clubs and some of Europe's best-loved electronic music festivals"[17]. As such, in the category of urbochrematonyms denoting locations for an evening drink or a night out, we notice urbochrematonyms which indicate the strong nexus neotribes-genius loci: rock/punk/hipster genius loci (Soviet, Shadow, Hardward, La Țevi), bohemian and cosy genius loci (Insomnia, Euphoria, Atelier, Booha Bar), summary vibe and old school genius loci (Cotton Club, EC Garden), conventional and mainstream which in time became established genius loci (Bulgakov, Klausen, Chios) (see Figure 4 below); live music/an alternative scene/underground atmosphere (Atelier, Flying Circus, /Form), clubbing atmosphere (NOA, After 8, New My Way) (see Figure 5 below). Being a very vibrant city, these places undergo continuous changes, this being just a glimpse into the multi-faced genius loci of Cluj-Napoca, where neotribes thrive.

17. *https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2020/jan/27/cluj-napoca-romania-city-break-locals-guide*

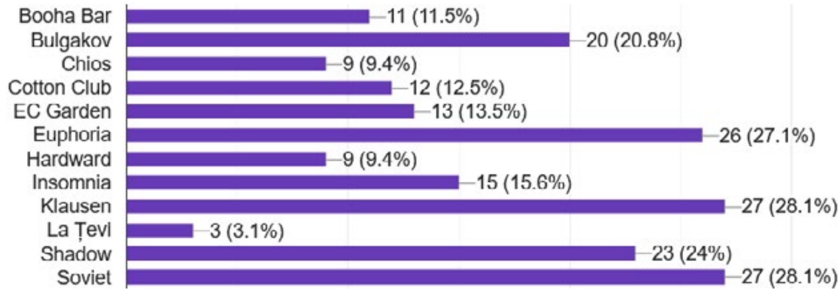


Fig. 4. Out for a drink

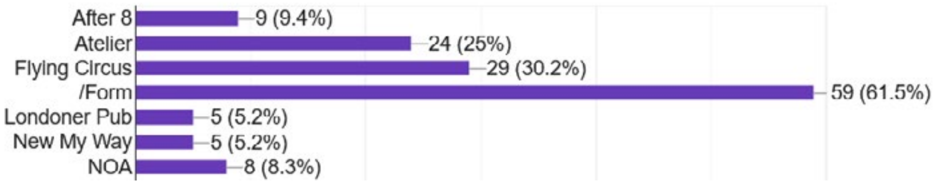


Fig. 5. A Night out

Taking into account the importance of genius loci in the formation and maintenance of neotribes, we also asked our respondents to provide an original name for a coffee place and a restaurant and to motivate their choice. As such, we make a selection of their answers, which we list below. We translated the examples from Romanian and the words in bold are our emphasis:

- √ Ibric [in Romanian, the word refers to the Turkish coffee pot]: Short name, easy to remember, melodic word. When you pronounce it, it automatically creates an image so it sticks in your memory for a long time. It sounds fun to say „Let's go to Ibric's for coffee". I imagine **the place is a huge Turkish coffee pot in which people sit and drink coffee**.
- √ Captain bean: because although it's small, it has **a friendly atmosphere** and a variety of products. They specialize in lattes and have seasonal selections and new recipes.

- √ Cofeels: The name seems original to me, given the intention of the café: **to help people with disabilities**. I think the name fits its purpose.
- √ Narcoffee: it's an interesting name, it's musical and catchy, it refers to the idea of taboo/ addiction for coffee, it promises **an experience you want again and again.**
- √ Atelier: the name matches the atmosphere and, I don't know if it's still the same, but they had pressed cardboard furniture, and **it really had a workshop vibe**.
- √ Olivo Coffee Culture (in Museum Square): I appreciate the effort to create **a culture of consumption and/or habitus.**
- √ Samsara: I think this is a unique name for a restaurant, and its meaning (the cycle of life) fits **the atmosphere of the place**.
- √ Zama [it means soup in the dialect spoken in Transylvania]: makes you crave a soup, it indicates traditional culinary specificity, it is **familiar**)
- √ Visuin: a special name, referring to **a secluded place with an intimate atmosphere.**
- √ La Vărzărie [it refers to a place where one can eat cabbage-based meals]: it's **authentic, autochthonous**, it is straightforward as to the menu, and it shows an attempt to revitalise old brands. I consider this to be a trend worth following.
- √ Garlic - an **essential ingredient** in Romanian cuisine.
- √ Soviet - the design, the names of the drinks match the name. Although it's a theme that Romanians have reservations about, Soviet has made it **fun and coo**l.
- √ VIA. A name that can be interpreted in many ways (e.g. vineyard, life, ancient Roman road, connection between point A and B, rest stop). The restaurant being an old refurbished house all these can fit. The letters A and V can be interpreted visually as symbols of a house.

Most of the respondents intuitively motivated the choice of the urbochrematonyms by referring to elements related to the actual definition of

genius loci and by showing the importance of the name of a place in relation to its spirit. As our selection of examples above shows, some key elements could be familiarity, authenticity, coolness, fun, intimacy, coziness, and people gathering. Besides the genius loci of these places, our respondents identified key elements pertaining to neotribes as they mention personal connections, preferences, and lifestyles, and even nostalgia, sometimes rendered through a single word, leaving room for interpretation. We translated the examples from Romanian and the words written in bold are our emphasis:

- √ Demmers: It's a perfect place to have **deep conversations in peace**. For me, it's **a safe space, an oasis of calm**.
- √ Music Pub: **Youth…**
- √ Sisters: it's one of my favorite places to **socialize**, and the name reminds me of the clientele - artists, writers, people interested in art, culture, maybe hipsters, it makes you think of **community, sisterhood**.
- √ Roa(d)sted Coffee Shop: we often go there with **friends** and we love it.
- √ I cannot choose only one - Booha, Atelier and /Form: I have had many emotionally intense experiences in these places with **friends** and my **partner**, including negative or potentially conflictual experiences, which were resolved eventually. The good, emotionally positive experiences were numerous, and we have excellent shared memories, such as introducing each other to different styles of music or meeting some very talented local DJs with whom we became friends.

Our respondents perceive urbochrematonyms as essential components of the identity of a place, 72.9% of our respondents considering the name of a coffee shop/bar/pub/restaurant to be more important than a slogan or the logo (see Figure 6 below). This indicates that urbochrematonyms contribute to the formation of genius loci and invite various neotribes to express their matching identities and experience the local culture, also

containing global characteristics that can be transferred from one place to another. This shows a fusion between the local and the global.

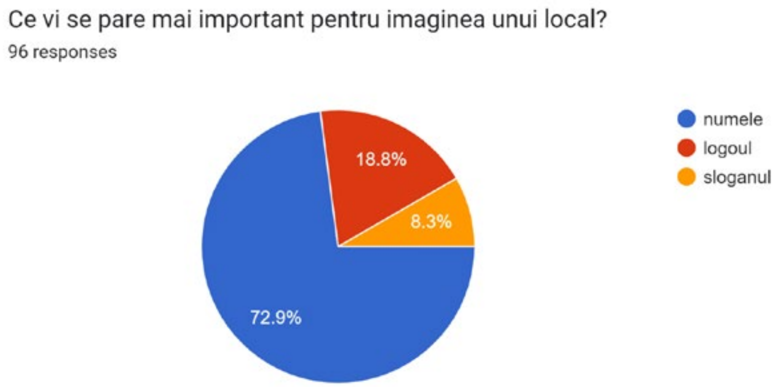


Figure 6. The importance of names. (What is most important for the image of a food establishment)

Most of the urbochrematonyms serve as mnemonic devices that carry history and culture, traditional and shared knowledge, clichés, wordplay and universal or local references. Moreover, they are connected to identity and the local atmosphere for both locals and foreigners. In this respect, 85.5% of our respondents consider that the name of a place contributes to the formation of identity in the long run (see Figure 7 below).

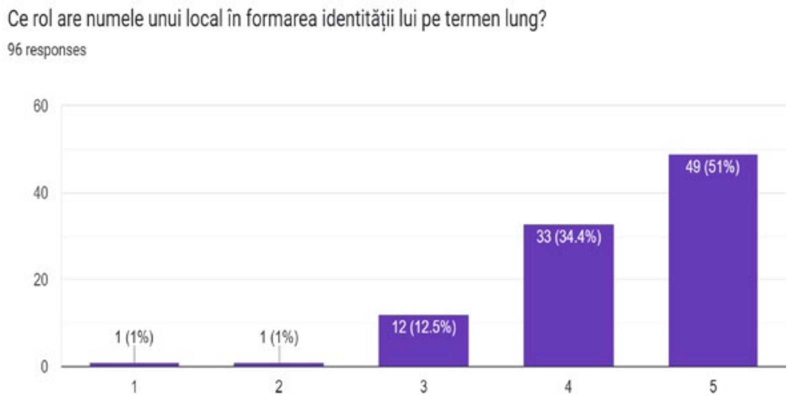


Fig. 7. The importance of urbochrematonyms in the long run. (What role does the name play in ensuring a food establishment's long-term image)

Conclusions

The present study aimed at analysing the intricate relation between the onymic category of urbochrematonyms and youth subcultures/neotribes in the urban landscape of Cluj-Napoca. The study shows that the process of creating urbochrematonyms is a complex interplay of linguistic, social, cultural, and commercial factors. These names emerge organically from the shared experiences and perceptions of a community, reflecting the unique characteristics of an urban area. Urbochrematonyms also function as mnemonic devices that encapsulate the history, culture,and shared knowledge of a place, carrying with them information of historical events, local traditions to popular cliches and wordplay, and making them an integral part of the collective memory of neotribes and the creation and maintenance of genius loci in urban landscapes.

The results obtained from the questionnaire show a strong connection between the formation of neotribes as consumer tribes and the place names, since they both are fluid or transient depending on shared interests, consumption patterns, and trends. Urbochrematonyms are more than just mere names, they constitute symbols of shared experiences, preferences, and identity expression through socialization with multiple neotribes. In the long run, they are essential in reflecting genius loci and contributing to giving places a distinct and recognisable character which continuously gather neotribes. Constituting such a complex linguistic category, urbochrematonyms hold potential for further investigations through interdisciplinary lenses combining fields such as onomastic studies, identity and cultural studies, sociolinguistics, sociology, and marketing.

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“Promise to Be True”—Identity Games and Self-Authorship in *A Hard Day’s Night*

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Abstract. Starting from the observation that the medium of the video is characterised by great semantic potential and versatility, in this paper we propose a discussion of the Beatles’ first feature film, *A Hard Day’s Night,* as a visual text that illustrates the construction of hybridised identity and the transition to what Robert Kegan calls the “self-authoring mind”, part of the continuing process of the individual’s development.

Key words: *Beatles, pop rock musical, identity, self-authorship, duality*

If I fell in love with you
Would you promise to be true
And help me understand?
The Beatles, “If I Fell”

Introduction: "If we must start again…"

On the 2nd of November 2023, the world of music witnessed an event that caused as much awe as controversy. On that date, the Beatles released "Now and Then", possibly the most unique bit in their entire repertoire. It is a song that has been in the making for more than four and a half decades. Started as John Lennon's private enterprise in 1977, preserved by his wife Yoko on the original cassette tape but shelved as merely an incomplete demo, it saw a brief revival attempt in 1995, when the surviving band members, Paul, George and Ringo, reconvened to make a release of some of Lennon's unreleased recordings as a band effort. While two of them were eventually delivered as records ("Free As a Bird" and "Real Love"), "Now and Then" was put aside for another fifteen years due to the technical difficulties the crew encountered at the time, which made the song unsuitable for public release. The same unfavourable circumstances nonetheless transformed the song into a true pop culture phenomenon—proof of what inspiration, dedication, friendship, artistry and technology can achieve when combined in a professional way. By 2021, advances in machine learning software and digital equipment created favourable conditions for the high-quality restoration of the original material, and two years later the world was finally ready for the song that would complete the catalogue of Britain's most famous pop-rock ensemble.

Possible speculations that the song is nothing more than a tardy attempt to turn legend into a financially-profitable product via artificial intelligence are easily dismissed upon close contact with the melody, the lyrics and the accompanying video. A soft psychedelic tune in Lennon's usual meditative-confessional note, dealing with the themes of loss, memory, love and friendship, "Now and Then" is a true collaborative effort. Lennon's original lyrics have been expanded by Paul, George's guitar is once again in harmony with Ringo's drums and Paul's bass notes, and in the first verse and the chorus sections Lennon and Paul sing together, reminding of the arrangements typical of their golden days; we even hear Ringo's approving "Good one" during the outro. Scattered along the melodic

foundation, there are parts of their earlier songs "Here, There and Everywhere", "Eleanor Rigby" and "Because", while the bridge is supported by a string section, as in many of their hallmark compositions of the late 1960s. In the music video old footage has been combined with new, gathering all four Beatles for one last heartwarming performance: George and Lennon, in their flamboyant "Sgt. Pepper"-era attire return from the video made for "I Say Hello, You Say Goodbye" (1967) for another memorable sing-along. Indeed, "Now and Then" shows us the Beatles at their best. As director Peter Jackson explains in reference to the challenges posed by the video, the song creates ideas and images and generates emotions. It reminds us that "[a]t their core, they [the Beatles] were irreverent and funny", that we "needed to laugh at The Beatles, and laugh with them". Even more importantly, the video calls attention to the concept of participative authorship, as it makes "each viewer create their own personal moment of farewell to The Beatles" (Jackson 2023). Within the brief visual space of four and a half minutes we see John, George, Paul and Ringo in various hypostases: as hippies, dressed in circus attire, wearing clean black suits, boasting their mop tops, on stage, in a stadium, in the studio and in a field, as the film of their career is rewound in front of our eyes. This might be the final chapter of the most fascinating book of pop culture, "Now and Then" seems to suggest. And yet, we are left wondering, as on so many other occasions, who the Beatles truly are.

Starting from these observations, in this paper we propose a discussion of the Beatles' first serious engagement with the possibilities of the visual medium, the 1964 film production *A Hard Day's Night*, as an example of the group's earliest preoccupations with the question of identity and individual development. Without aiming at an exhaustive treatment of the problem (after all, the case of "Now and Then" suggests that we may be dealing with a potentially developing story), we will be interested, specifically, in how the film illustrates the construction of hybridised identity, as well as how it provides an example of the transition of youth to what Robert Kegan called a new "order of consciousness", or meaning-making system (the basic tenets of which will be exposed in due time).

"Nothing you can do that can't be done": hybridisation and the illusion of reality in the Beatles' first film

The earlier reference to "Then and Now" also highlights another essential quality of the pop song, namely, its semantic potential and versatility relative to the visual medium, in particular, video productions of various types. For instance, when it comes to film, as has been demonstrated by previous scholarship (Lannin and Caley 2005), pop music may perform a plethora of possible functions, from enabling role-play, triggering memory, aiding narration or serving as a marketing device, to signalling alienation or supporting the group membership of characters. The Beatles themselves quickly understood the advantages of the medium. Indeed, as Balkányi has pointed out, in the 1960s the Beatles became synonymous with "innovation" and "creative rebirth". In this sense, their relationship with the emergent technologies (such as television, portable cameras or new mixing and editing techniques) implied two complementary directions: on the one hand, the new visuality of the 1960s became the engine of renewal; on the other, the Beatles' desire for change required ever newer ideas, which were made possible by the novel technological resources (2012, 4). The Beatles did not represent an isolated case, however. During the whole decade, television and popular music were engaged in an enduring partnership, contributing to each other's success (3). Nonetheless, the Beatles can be considered one of the best examples of the momentum of this collaboration, since, the author further argues, the fortunate interplay of factors that contributed, at the time, to their success was validated through the effects exerted upon the following decades (2).

Moving on to *A Hard Day's Night*, we discover many of the aforementioned signs of eclecticism and artistic concern for the question of identity. The film's opening sequence, introduced by the much-discussed chord of the eponymous song—"probably the most recognisable sound in popular music" (Werner 2017), is suggestive of the underlying logic of the whole production, with repercussions on the manner in which it tackles the problematic of identity too. The note, deceptively simple on the surface,

yet thoroughly complicated in essence—the result of the contribution of several band members using different instruments, as proven by the laborious sound analysis which has eventually revealed its "mystery" (Werner 2017), can be regarded as a musical reflection of what the Beatles' success was ultimately reliant on: the carefully harmonised group effort of four talented individual personalities. Furthermore, the twangy instantaneousness of the chord simultaneously hints at an end and a beginning—a kind of allegorical transitional space resulting from the hybridisation of antinomical elements. Indeed, in the scene that follows we see the Fabs enter the railway station, running *away from* frenzied fans, but running *toward* the camera, *toward* us. They seem to share much of the excitement of the crowd, yet we surprise them hiding in phone boxes and photobooths or jumping over railings in an attempt to escape their pursuers; we even see Paul wearing a fake moustache and beard, burying his face in a newspaper while his grandfather is casually perusing an issue of the "Men Only" pin-up magazine. This introductory sequence informs us that "duality" (or "duplicity", "ambivalence") will be a central aspect of *A Hard Day's Night*. Glynn calls this a "doubleness, a resistance to closure", drawing attention upon what is perhaps the most important intention of the film—the fact that it "prompts an active and collaborative engagement with a teasing, ironic complicity" (2013, 87). This, Glynn further argues, is also visible in the film's treatment of genre conventions: the simultaneous use and questioning of cinema-verité, apparent in the mix of documentary realism and musical comedy, representing the distinctive formal foundation upon which this cinematic text is built (89). However, as can be seen later in the film, even the assumed faux-documentary mode is challenged in the scene which shows a group of screaming Beatles fans who have gathered around the band's limousine—a scene which employs actual news footage that was incorporated into the film during editing, leading to a continuity error noticeable in the different clothes worn by the band on the train and after their arrival (Glynn 2013, 84). Furthermore, the repeated allusions to false identity (the hiding places, Paul's fake facial hair—which, coincidentally, would become his signature look between 1968-1970) prove, as Glynn

aptly points out, that "pretence" is another key characteristic of *A Hard Day's Night*: "[i]n essence, the film *is* about putting on a show" (2013, 90). Or, as Balkányi has noted, the thematic core of the film is represented by "the illusion of reality" (2012, 3-4).

These latter aspects seem to be corroborated by the lyrics of many of the songs which make up the soundtrack of the film. They include a high number of hypothetical constructions that describe scenarios which call for an active emotional and imaginative engagement on the part of the audience: "It's been a hard day's night // *I should be sleeping like a log*" ("A Hard Day's Night"), "*I should have known better* with a girl like you // That *I would love* everything that you do" ("I Should Have Known Better"), "*If I fell in love* with you // *Would you promise* to be true" ("If I Fell"), "*I'll buy you a diamond ring* my friend // *If it makes you feel alright* // *I'll get you anything* my friend // *If it makes you feel alright*" ("Can't Buy Me Love"), "*If somebody tries to take my place* // *Let's pretend* we just can't see his face // In this world there's nothing *I would rather do* // 'Cause I'm happy just to dance with you" ("I'm Happy Just to Dance with You")—to quote but a few. The highlighted parts are indicative of a game-play involving both the singer-performer and the audience, the result of which is the construction of an imaginary-but-possible space where virtual identities are created and tested out, thus suspending the real-life boundaries between participants. For the duration of the song, the auditors do not hear the Beatles talking to them, but potential partners who disclose their most intimate desires, fears, suspicions and decisions. Moreover, this temporary suspension of boundaries also makes it possible for the audience to adopt the position of the confessing partner themselves, should that hypostasis suit them better.

Based on the above, it may be argued that *A Hard Day's Night*, provides, from the outset, an artistic insight into the unstable nature of identity, underscoring, at the same time, the necessity to accept the relativistic, participatory and processual nature of the concept. It is a view that Stuart Hall has eloquently summed up as follows:

> … identity is not a set of fixed attributes, the unchanging essence of the inner self, but a constantly shifting process of *positioning*. We tend to think of identity as taking us back to our roots, the part of us which remains essentially the same across time. In fact identity is always a never-completed process of becoming—a process of shifting *identifications*, rather than a singular, complete, finished state of being. (2017, 16)

In the following section, we will look more closely at some of the implications of this idea, as it complements the previously introduced notion of duplicity, understood both as "duality" and "pretence" (game-play). We will also offer further contextualisation of the Beatles' fascination with the question of identity.

"I'll try not to sing out of key": construction(s) of identity in *A Hard Day's Night*

That "duality" is a word which can readily be associated with the Beatles is easy to understand if one looks back at the decade that made them both famous and controversial. Watson (2015) proposes a parallel between the 1950s and the 1960s, arguing that the changes brought about by the latter are commensurate with the impact of colour film in cinema: "If the Fifties were in black and white, then the Sixties were in Technicolor". The author also explains that in the same period London managed to reinvent itself, becoming the vanguard of a new, progressive youthful spirit, changing in some ten years "from the bleak, conservative city, only just beginning to forget the troubles of the Second World War, into the capital of the world, full of freedom, hope and promise". This progressive 1960s youth phenomenon was so impressive that even the authorities perceived its potential. Being, essentially, the latest and most convincing expression of British pop culture, the Beatles were quickly appropriated by mainstream politicians due to their inherent marketing potential and used in their campaigns to promote the image of "a New Britain characterised by forward-looking,

youthful vigour", as demonstrated by Prime Minister Harold Wilson's investment of the band as Members of the Order of the British Empire in 1965 (Osgerby 2020b). The Beatles were living proof, says Osgerby, that Britain had entered "an age of bold, liberated modernity" (2020b). However, this positive, embracing attitude appears to be in contradiction with the general duplicity behind the establishment's position regarding youth during the 1950s and much of the 1960s: if they got to be celebrated as exponents of a new, leisurely, consumerist, self-taught force, it is no less true that the same part of society saw them, concomitantly, as a menace to public safety and conservative values, an incontestable sign of the state of disarray in which Britain had fallen after the war (Osgerby 2020a). While the Beatles enjoyed a generally positive reception at home, elsewhere the reactions to them were, occasionally, much less friendly. For example, during their famous 1964 American tour, they elicited a series of extreme reactions from a number of public figures, who saw them as a threat to teenagers' mental health and morals, going even as far as to compare these exponents of "the British Invasion" with a cataclysmic vermin infestation. Cristopher Thiessen (2019) summed up some of the "strangest reactions to Beatlemania" upon the 55th anniversary of the London debut of *A Hard Day's Night*. Thus, for Dr. Bernard Saibel, a child guidance expert writing for *The Seattle Times*, the effect of the band upon teenage girls during concerts was tantamount to "some demonic urge", whereas John Bull, a contributor to *The Greenwood Commonwealth*, claimed that the impact left by the Beatles was comparable to "the utter devastation" brought upon crops by locust hordes, calling for complete cessation of the trade relations between the two countries. As we shall see further on, *A Hard Day's Night* hints at this duplicitous stance during some of its narrative segments, reminding us—however gently— of the "irreverent" attitude referred to in the opening section of this paper.

The impact of the Beatles on their contemporaneous teenage public is one of the key themes addressed in *A Hard Day's Night*. We see it in the hysterical reactions of fans (mostly females) during the street chase scenes (both in the opening sequence and later on, as for example, upon

their arrival to the press conference), along their train ride (the improvised musical performance in the midst of female admirers) and in the studio (in the film's closing sequence showing the band's televised performance). Before 1966, the year they decided to stop touring, the interaction with their audiences was, undoubtedly, one of the most precise indicators of their identity-shaping power. Kohl reminds us in this sense that in 1967 the band's eighth studio album, *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, became the prime "soundtrack to the Summer of Love, which saw a large segment of society turn away from traditional hierarchies", being also the epitome of what may be considered "the most carnivalesque decade" of the twentieth century (1996, 87). At this point, we notice another manifestation of duality associated with the band, one already suggested in their first feature film. On the one hand, as Balkányi explains in her discussion of the scene in which the band break out from the studio through a fire exit, initiating a less than two-minute sequence unfolding against the musical backdrop of "Can't Buy Me Love", *escape* (announced by Ringo's exclamation "We're out!") is at the core of the film's concerns (Balkányi 2012, 7; see also Street 2005, 81). Later on, we will see how *A Hard Day's Night* deals with the possibility and limits of freedom and how this ties in with the question of individual growth. Except for the few such manifest moments in which we see the Beatles bearing the burden of a fame that possibly degrades their own sense of individuality, the band's direct engagement with audiences, seen from the perspective of the latter, represented indeed an opportunity to experience freedom outside the constraints of societal norms. For example, Cottet and Paché argue that the Beatles made it possible for young people to have a "memorable consumer experience" (2022, 34). Particularly the participatory nature of the concert represented an opportunity for teen girls to express their rebellious impulses. In other words, the concert was not an end in itself but a means to attain it, a necessary "technical support" required for the materialisation of the emotion-laden self-expressive experience. In fact, seen from this angle, even Beatlemania can be interpreted as "the transient reaction of teenagers to satisfy their emotional needs" (41). On the other

hand, whether participatory (concerts, interviews, autograph sessions) or passive (memorabilia, merchandise), contact with the Beatles also had the complementary effect of creating new identities through *identification* with their idols and *membership* within a same-interest group. Feldman-Barrett (2022) notes in this sense that Beatlemania led to the rise of an unprecedented fan culture "instigated and dominated by girls". During the early sixties, there emerged a culture of buying, collecting, interacting, imitating, ultimately leading to the commodification of the Beatles themselves: no longer just people or artists, they became objects of consumption. Integral to commodification was also the "iconification" of the Beatles, a process to which the band themselves contributed directly. According to Martinelli, this is indicated by the Beatles' album covers, which have become cultural landmarks whose influence reached "well beyond the borders of the musical sphere" (2022, 802), as well as in the physical appearance of the group members, particularly their instantly recognisable faces—possibly the most easily recognisable ones in the entire history of pop music, even in their most stylised representations, frequently reduced to their signature mop-tops or other distinctive markers (797). The end-titles of *A Hard Day's Night* epitomise both forms of iconification, as they consist of a rapid succession of close-ups of each of the band members carrying diverse facial expressions—simultaneously a back-reference to the brief photoshoot session included earlier in the film and a side note about the "manufacturing" of the Beatles as cultural products, since the front cover of the album released a couple of days after the film is in fact a collage of the very same shots.

In what follows, we will return to the film in order to highlight how it provides a view of identity as constructed through the interaction of several parties and reliant, to a large extent, on dissimulation. For the Beatles playing themselves in *A Hard Day's Night*, dissimulation performs several functions. For one thing, it allows them to remain elusive and escape the normative efforts of the consumption culture they have become part of together with their fans. For another, it is a mode of self-expression and continuous self-exploration, a form of resistance to the comfortable

regulating tendencies of the individual and, as such, part of the process of "creative rebirth" that Balkányi has noted (see supra). Director Richard Lester encoded these references in the opening scene, which may be used as a key to decipher many of the later key-moments too. The sequence in the railway station can be interpreted as an example of a transitional space. Apart from the station, which itself carries the dual connotation of destination and temporary passage (we see the four arrive there, but we know they are bound to leave for another place in no time), there are other clues to what we are going to be offered later in the story: a simulacrum of communication, as suggested by pretend-calls the boys make on the pay-phones or the photo booth in which no snapshot is actually taken. In fact, as with "Now and Then", the film pressures viewers to provide a meaningful interpretation of their own. The process is ineffable and sometimes verges on the surreal, as with the card game that spontaneously and mysteriously turns into a rendition of "I Should Have Known Better"—a choice of song that is not in the least surprising, since the title, ironically, sends to the uncertainty and doubt experienced by the viewers who witness the unfolding spectacle.

There are also a number of symbolic "magic boxes" and "smoke screens" that facilitate the flux of meaning in the film and contribute to hybridisation. Thus, in the early scene which takes place in the first-class compartment, the camera shows John, George and Ringo, capturing, at the same time, the faces of Paul and his grandfather reflected in a mirror. This is a pointer to the double role of the old man: a doppelgänger, the mischievous agent of temptation (we will return to this aspect later, in connection with Ringo's position in the narrative) and the comical embodiment of obsolescent values and beliefs, disruptive but otherwise relatively inoffensive. A similar device appears later in the hotel room when the boys discover the waiter hiding in the wardrobe, reading an issue of the "Fabulous on Film" magazine. He almost becomes an embodied manifestation of the proverbial skeleton in the closet, since he has lent his clothes to Paul's grandfather (who, using an invitation received by Ringo, has left for a gambling session held at a high-brow club). For George, the waiter is a "lurker", a reminder of the past belonging to the same lineage as Paul's grandfather.

The largest space of exchange is, however, the television studio, the place where magic happens continuously, in a scripted way. The boys' arrival on location is marked off by their passing through a tent-like construction, which they use to turn temporarily invisible to their fans as they get out of the car that has taken them there. They are now ready for the new roles the media has prepared for them. There are a number of short episodes in the studio during which the Beatles take on various temporary identities. John is separated from the rest by a woman named Millie, who seems to have recognised his face (see the earlier reference to iconicity) but cannot tell precisely who he is. After a hilarious exchange, John concludes that the woman actually looks more like his commercialised image than he himself does. In the meantime, George is convinced to audition for a commercial with a popular teen model, but the session goes wrong, as he finds the shirts he has to advertise "grotty" (i.e. grotesque). Both of these incidents speak about the power of the media to create a familiar and conveniently distorted image of the individual. The Beatles seem to have understood the mechanism behind such transformations and for a while they choose to play along. After they finish recording the performance video for "And I Love Her", they return backstage, where they take advantage of the available props in order to mock various characters: Paul gives an exaggerated rendition of Hamlet, Ringo mimics a royal guard, John pretends to be a starlet named Betty and even Shake, their tour manager, puts on a wig. Paul's grandfather calls them "a bunch of sissies" and complains about "feeling decidedly straight-jacketed". After they leave the dressing room, they make their way across a stage where a tap dance is being performed. Incidentally, the posters on the wall show a number of beetles, proving that they have successfully assimilated the moniker suggested by some American commentators. While crossing the stage they mix with the dancers and briefly tap-dance with them. They even play a couple of notes from the song that accompanies the dance while tuning up their instruments. Predictably though, the most important magic boxes are represented by the two principal recording and displaying devices—the camera and the TV screen (or, in the given context, the studio monitor). They facilitate the

most fluid exchange of identities; they interpose between percipient and thing perceived, acting both as interface and generator of new content. This is seen, for instance, during the studio performance of "And I Love Her", when the Beatles are shown on TV screens and through the windows of the mixing box. The scene captures the process through which reality is "abstracted" in order to be replaced by a machine-made one: at one point, there are several superimposed images of Paul's face as seen both on the TV monitors and through the lens of the filming camera but the face on the monitors eventually fades into the one seen through the lens (which is the same as the real face of Paul performing on stage). The machine, it is suggested, becomes part of the character. The process reaches its climax during the televised concert, which marks, symbolically, the dissolution of the borders between the private, the public and the imaginary domains. Now, we see the Beatles' faces on the monitors, the recording personnel in the mixing box and the ecstatic fans beyond the glass window. Being simultaneously a transparent and a solid medium, the glass of the studio equipment both separates and merges. We understand thus that in this constructed realm there can be no individual performers, only a band that plays music in unison for the benefit of the public. This is an atemporal space too, a sterile environment with no history. Consequently, when Paul's grandfather makes a final impromptu appearance on stage he is quickly whisked away by George and Paul (who kicks him off the stage in a symbolic gesture).

A Hard Day's Night is constructed in a circular manner. The final scene tells us that in spite of this intricate multifaceted game, we have been witness to probably nothing more than a "phase" in the lives of these four young men. First, we see them again running toward us and follow them, together with the camera, to the helicopter that will shuttle them to their next pit stop. For a moment, we even have the impression they are going to take us with them, but this remains an unrealised prospect. As the scene is about to make way for the end-titles, we see the posters with the forged Beatles signatures being released from above. This final tongue-in-the-cheek gesture indicates that their intention is to remain, for

the time being, elusive: they may have rid themselves of what both pop culture and the mature adults have been trying to forge *for* them, but this newly found "purity" is a blank slate waiting to be filled with a story yet to be written. In other words, even though the mask has been dropped, the real face still won't show.

Despite this elaborate construction, the film's take on the problematic of identity is not limited to duality and gameplay. Sometimes, the light-hearted humour informing much of the production becomes subservient to a more serious intention. To illustrate this, the second facet of identity we are going to discuss in the remainder of this section is the reflection of what constructivist-developmental psychologist Robert Kegan has called "the self-authoring mind", one of the several stages marking the process of a person's growth into adulthood. In a series of seminal publications (1982, 1994), Kegan proposed the concept of epistemological "lenses" in order to explain the manner in which humans make sense of reality, through successive "orders of consciousness" or "minds", each more complex than the previous ones (the impulsive, instrumental, socialised, self-authoring and self-transforming minds). In Kegan's view, growth implies a transformational "subject-object move" conducive to a change in the person's meaning-making structures. The use of any particular lens makes the person the subject of that lens, albeit unconsciously. Once a lens is perceived as inadequate for coping with new challenges, a more complex lens is developed. A person who has become subject to a new lens (i.e. who has developed a new mind) is able to understand the limitations of the previous one, which thus becomes an object that can be examined by the mind. Elsewhere (2009), Kegan identifies the three most important adult meaning systems (corresponding to three adult "plateaus"): the socialised mind, the self-authoring mind and the self-transforming mind. Each of these minds is characterised by radically different ways of meaning-making. The socialised mind is guided by expectations and the individual's environment, by relationships with people, with ideas and beliefs. By contrast, the self-authoring mind enables individuals to distance themselves from the social environment and use their own authority to assess

external expectations and make informed choices for action. Individuals using this lens can set up their own boundaries and limits in agreement with their belief systems and personal values, developing a sense of self that does not depend on external validation. Lastly, the self-transforming mind makes it possible for individuals to detach from the ideological and belief systems they have subscribed to and examine them critically, as well as to question their own authority. This is a fluid order of consciousness characterised, principally, by non-attachment.

The essential difference between the socialised mind and the self-authoring mind is similar to the difference between the desire to be driven and the desire to drive, says Kegan (2009). Given its main theme—the Beatles' rapport with fame, fans and the pop music industry, one expects *A Hard Day's Night* to be more directly illustrative of the former, rather than the latter "desire". After all, it was just a little more than a year earlier that the band had released their first studio album, *Please, Please Me*, which included two hit singles, the album's title song and "Love Me Do". Other memorable songs followed suit on their second album: "All My Loving", "You Really Got a Hold on Me" and "I Wanna Be Your Man". As these titles suggest, a lot of the Beatles' early creative efforts resulted in songs that praised dedication, commitment, partnership, even subservience—values commonly associated with the socialised mind. As a testimonial of Beatlemania, *A Hard Day's Night* indeed pays homage to fans, the Fabs' most relevant social environment. The desire to be driven is visible in the pleasure the band derives from interacting with fans, both at their rowdiest (as during the initial chase seen and the conclusive televised concert sequence) and in their relatively tame manifestations (the improvised concert on the train), but also in their generally inoffensive, playful and superficial resilience towards the requests of their managers and production team.

However, despite the fact that between 1962-1964 the dominant drive within the band appeared to be "the eagerness to please, rather than an uncompromising display of their individual identities" (Martinelli 2022, 798), there is a segment in the film narrative which puts one band member in the limelight, thereby also taking us closer to understanding the mechanism

behind the transition from the socialised to the self-authoring mind. The segment in question focuses on Ringo, who is tasked with keeping an eye on Paul's grandfather an hour before the final studio run-through. In the canteen, the quiet Ringo is convinced by the old man that "parading" is preferable to extracting wisdom from books, lest one might become stale in middle age. Trying to allay the risk of becoming the deplorable future self with which he has been presented, Ringo shoots off the set, insulting George on the corridor and surprising Paul and John with his obvious intention, embarking upon what promises to be a journey of self-discovery (John's snide remark "Here comes the middle-aged boy wonder" is a further nudge toward this move). Realising that Ringo has been "stirred up" by the "old mixer", who "filled his head with notions", the other three Beatles rush to retrieve him. But Ringo's adventure in the wilderness does not turn out to be a young man's escape fantasy. The calm of the initial phase in which we see him strolling the streets casually, photographing milk bottles and hopping along the river-bank with a carefree attitude soon gives way to less fortunate moments. He tries to take a picture of himself, but when he pulls the chord to trigger the shutter, the camera falls into the river, preventing him, symbolically, to immortalise his newly-gained freedom. He then meets a boy who has run from school to gang up with his no-good friends, providing an occasion for Ringo to contemplate an alternative personal history and reminding him that, just like the young ruffian, he is a "deserter". While playing darts in a local pub he hits a man's sandwich and almost injures a parrot, instantly becoming a "troublemaker" in the public eye. Afterward, his attempt at being courteous by fashioning a makeshift causeway out of his trench coat for a young woman to step over a freshly dug hole misfires when the woman falls into the hole. He is apprehended by a policeman and ends up in a police station, where he is joined by Paul's grandfather, brought in for trying to sell Beatles photos with forged signatures. The entire segment is doubly symbolic and infuses a moral message into a film that we expect to be foreign to such concerns. Ringo realises how unprepared he is to play the role of an independent adult, but at the same time, he also becomes aware of the consequences

of an impulsive decision forced upon him by a manipulative adult. In other words, in just one stroke, he learns about the vulnerability and the destructive potential of the adult self. In the wake of the lesson, he makes an informed choice, distancing himself from a world that is not his own, as indicated by his dismissal of the idea of ill-meaning police constables bent on hitting him, which Paul's grandfather tries to plant in his head while they are waiting in the station.

From another perspective, as Kashner aptly noted (2014), Ringo's experience also highlights the importance of public perception in identity-formation: without the protection of the group moniker (the constructed and assumed identity of a Beatle), Ringo is likely to face harsh treatment at the hands of both authorities and fans. However, that he accepts his rescue by the band and chooses to return to the band is not the result of public pressure but of his own understanding of his position within the band, which he feels now essential to who he is: he is Ringo, without whom there is no Beatles, only a "limited company", as John has noted earlier. Or, as Kegan would put it, his membership has transformed from a subject to an object, through accession to a higher order of consciousness: by stepping out of his position as band member, he is granted his own space to emerge as an individual in the public eye. He *is not* his role as a Beatle, but he now *has* a role as a Beatle; and, while he is not just his role as a Beatle, accepting this role is quintessential to what makes him Ringo (let us not forget that of all the Beatles, he is the only one who adopted a stage name, his real name being Richard Starkey). Similarly, in a more abstract sense, Ringo's escapade may be interpreted as proof of the symbolic importance of the Beatles for Britain, as it gives the viewers "a glimpse of what Britain might have been like without the Beatles—the dispirited canal, the tired old Turk's Head pub, the bored, joyless faces of adults with hard lives" (Kashner 2014).

Conclusions: "You say you want a revolution…"

In his study of the narrating of memory and selfhood in the Beatles' songs, Kenneth Womack argues that the band's musical journey during the 1960s can be seen as an extended confession about growing up. Their music, says Womack, is a form of live-authorship which testifies to a conscious effort to give an expression to the difficulties of this formative process (2010, 262). As we have seen, on a fundamental level, a *Hard Day's Night* is also preoccupied with the same problem, shedding light on some of the strategies and milestones involved in the construction of identity. Rather than concentrating exclusively on the fairly easily marketable theme of popular success, the film touches upon issues pertaining to identity and some of its implications—the probing, disruption, as well as establishment of boundaries, in a continuous, fluid way. Such a direction proves that *A Hard Day's Night*, much like the rest of their oeuvre, can be considered an example of the "creative self-reflexivity" which came to characterise the 1960s, the period in which the British pop music film, in turn, reached its maturity, as Glynn pointed out (2013, 69).

At the end of our argumentation, let us briefly return to one of the final segments of the film. The part that shows us the Beatles' televised concert includes several scenes in which we see the band performing on stage. The placement of the four musicians is in accordance with their preferred arrangement during live shows: facing the camera, there is Paul on the left, John on the right, with George slightly off centre by Paul's side; in the background, we see Ringo with his drum kit, on a pedestal. Within the framework of the film narrative, this particular distribution reinforces Ringo's reintegration into the band, as we cannot fail to notice the smile on his face the moment the camera focuses on him. In equal measure, Martinelli aptly observes, the arrangement of the four during stage performances testifies to their "democratic" organisation as a band (2022, 803). Once again, this can be inscribed within the broader changes that took place during the 1950s and 1960s, that converged toward a profound break with the past, affecting spheres as different as politics, art, the class system,

gender or age relations. In this context, we can say that one of the Beatles' greatest contributions consisted in the "levelling" effect they exerted on popular culture (Kohl 1996, 87) by understanding the importance of the fusing of contradictory influences, trends, notions or even impulses in a single, coherent vision.

As our discussion has tried to prove, the Beatles' first feature film is a convincing example of the enduring power of this integrative vision. "We all want to change the world", remarked the Fabs in their well-known song "Revolution". In the benevolent didactic tone that came to characterise their later works, they also told us what this change requires: "you'd better free your mind"—that is, reinvent oneself, letting go of all self-imposed barriers, embracing self-authorship.

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The Marauders Fandom: Reimagining Canon, Reshaping Identity and Redefining Representation

LAURA ALBU

Abstract. This article delves into the fascinating world of the Marauders fandom within the broader Harry Potter fan community. It explores how fans of this subfandom engage with the concepts of canon and fanon. Through the lens of racebending, the article demonstrates how fans reimagine the beloved Potter characters with diverse racial backgrounds, constructing representation that mainstream media often lacks. The article further explores the queer aspects of the Marauders fandom, where characters are reimagined with LGBTQ+ identities, serving as a form of resistance against the controversial views held by the author of the series. Fan fiction and fan casting are key tools for fans to construct narratives that reflect their identities. In essence, this article uncovers how fan communities such as the Marauders fandom can empower individuals by allowing them to actively shape the narratives they love, thus fostering preferred representations and identities within the fandom realm.

Key words: *Harry Potter, fandom, Marauders, representation, fanon, canon*

Introduction

The *Harry Potter* fandom is currently one of the largest online, only rivalled by the likes of *Marvel* and K-pop fans[1]. As a fandom based on one universe, according to the *archiveofourown.com*[2] stats, it holds the largest volume of published fanwork. It does not come as a surprise that even after the original series came to an end, people are still finding themselves to be part of the community. Pottermania, as Ernest Tucker called it in 1999, is a phenomenon that is not likely to leave the online space soon. Despite radical takes made by the author and a desire by many former, as well as current, fans to remove her influence from the source material, every month the *Harry Potter* tag on ao3 gains tens of thousands of new fan works (chcltcvrdstrwbrrs)[3]. As the fandom grows, many fans are developing varied subfandoms within the community, Tosenberger noting that the fandom as a whole is now characterised by a "proliferation of specialised microfandoms" (2014, 9). From those who choose to focus solely on the Golden Trio[4] era to those who shift their interest to the Marauders[5] era, or even those that are mainly entranced by Dumbledore and his story, there is a microfandom for everyone in the large community. However, unlike the Golden Trio fans, the Marauders subfandom is more fascinated by characters that have barely been mentioned in the original source material, thus putting a distance between them and J.K. Rowling's work.

The aim of this article is to present the Marauders subfandom and show how important a fan community is in creating representations. The article is structured in six parts, starting with a brief history of the Marauders fandom. The second part deals with transformative works, meant

1. *https://www.scoopwhoop.com/entertainment/army-marvel-biggest-fandoms-in-the-world/* (accessed 8.10.23)
2. Henceforth, I will alternate between *archiveofourown.com* and ao3 when referring to the website.
3. Stats taken from chcltcvrdstrwbrrs' series "ao3 monthly stats" on TikTok. *https://vm.tiktok.com/ZGJKvkt4o/*
4. Golden Trio is the name given to the friendship between Harry Potter, Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger.
5. The Marauders is the name of the friendship between James Potter, Sirius Black, Remus Lupin and Peter Pettigrew. Marauders era refers to their time in Hogwarts or during The First Wizarding War.

to make the reader understand that the community is heavily linked to fan-made media and the reasons thereof. On a similar note, the third part is about canon and fanon, continuing the idea that the Marauders fandom is solely dependent on its fans. The last three parts also pick up from this, the article being a continuous dialogue. They will focus on representation and identity in the community and why fans choose to create their own representations and how it can empower them. At the time of writing this article, the author had been part of the fandom for ten years contributing fan fiction on archiveofourown and interacting with other fans on social media. This information is relevant as they have been exposed to the continuous changes within the fandom, and have been influenced by them in their perception of the characters.

The Origins of the Marauders Fandom

It was after Rowling published the third instalment in her *Harry Potter* series, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, that the fandom started to take form. Having introduced the rest of James Potter's friends, called the Marauders, fans took an instant liking to two of his friends, Sirius Black, James' best friend and Harry's godfather, and Remus Lupin, the werewolf dealing with prejudice from the society in which he lives, and, subsequently, Harry's professor in his third year at Hogwarts. The way in which their dynamic was written, with Remus being the only one able to tame Sirius' rage (Rowling, 1999 230-32) and them frequently touching (226), made fans think that there was more to their relationship. Thus, they took to forums, to LiveJournal and, possibly, zines and started rewriting the relationship between Remus and Sirius, commonly known as Wolfstar. The earliest pieces of fan fiction I found were published in the year 2000 on *fanfiction.net*, but there may have been earlier ones that are now lost.

The following two *Harry Potter* books, *Goblet of Fire* and *Order of the Phoenix* helped develop the growing popularity of the ship[6]. Rowling

6. *Shipping* is the act of creating a romantic pairing between two people or characters who are not otherwise romantically linked. *Shippers* are the people who *ship* these characters; the

reveals that Sirius had to "lie low at Lupin's" (Rowling 2000, 713) and that after the summer spent together, Remus moved in with Sirius in his childhood home (Rowling 2003, 118) where he spent long stretches of time watching and staring at his best friend (88-9). By the time the fifth volume came out and, subsequently, the third Harry Potter movie was running in the cinemas, the Marauders fandom had started to take a solid form within the bounds of the original community. The third movie had a special place in the fandom, as the actors who played the Wolfstar duo, David Thewils in the role of Remus Lupin and Gary Oldman as Sirius Black, took it upon themselves to portray the relationship as romantic, as they stated in interviews[7]. The two were convinced that Sirius and Remus were meant to be more than just best friends, with the film director, Alfonso Cuarón, instructing the actors to portray their characters as queers. The performance of the two, along with Severus Snape, another character, calling their bickering akin to "that of an old married couple" in the film made the fandom grow, the fanfics multiply, and thus, love for the Marauders became something that more and more fans found themselves feeling.

It was during this time that *The Shoebox Project* was published online (2004). A multimedia collection of fics, written by different authors, portrayed what eventually came to be known as the Marauders era. The pieces were mostly in epistolary form, but not limited to it; there were cards, diary entries, and photos. While many may consider *The Shoebox Project* to be a poor characterisation of the Marauders, the work did influence many future writers in the fandom in terms of headcanons and how some characters would end up being portrayed. Seeing as *The Shoebox Project* is such an early entry in the fandom's fic history, it should not come as a surprise that such a massive work, with thirty-three chapters that delved into the lives of not only Remus and Sirius, but also James and Lily's relationship, became one of the foundational pieces within the fandom. *The Shoebox Project*, Rowling's canon works, and the queer portrayal in the films, all helped build the Marauders fandom, which remains a massive part of the Harry Potter community, although the contemporary fan space is quite different from the initial one.

pairing itself is called a *ship*. (Merriam-Webster)

7. *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FcSLs0UXvuY* (timestamp 1:10-1:40)

The Importance of Transformative Works Within the Marauders Fandom

Merriam-Webster defines fan fiction as "stories involving popular fictional characters that are written by fans and often posted on the Internet", a somewhat vague, yet correct definition. Henry Jenkins (2006), however, attributes the existence of fan fiction to both the fascination as well as the frustration of the fans with the canon of their favourite works, thus placing the focus on the community. What most academics can agree on, however, is that fanworks (including fanart, not only written works) are transformative. It is a symbiotic relationship, that between a fan and the source text: while the fan takes the text, feeds on it, regurgitates it in a way that takes the source material and elevates, or, in some cases downgrades it, the creators of the source text are, too, *taking* something back from the fan. Be it the latter's money, input, or loyalty to the characters and the story, both parties benefit from the relationship.

Cromwell has notably said that "fan fiction is queer-friendly space, and because of this it's no surprise that trans people have found sympathy, understanding, and belonging within the fan fiction community" (2023). Queerness, a term that will be used throughout this article to refer to both gender identity and sexuality, as accepted within fandom spaces, is a concept embraced by many writers in the Harry Potter community in opposition to J.K. Rowling. They refuse to endorse Rowling because of some related public comments the author made on her Twitter profile, which they regard as biased and hurtful. Indeed, these were followed by an influx of reactive negative tags on the ao3 website. Rowling's name appears in 326 separate, freeform tags on the archive, most of them about how the authors do not support her position or, to be more specific, about how "J.K. Rowling can eat my whole a*s s Im taking her characters and making them gay and trans"[8]. The latter appears in two separate stories. The negative feelings that Rowling's actions have sparked in her fans are evidenced by the presence of the "F**k J.K. Rowling" or "F**k JKR" tag occurring in 155 cases.

8. *https://archiveofourown.org/tags/JK%20rowling%20can%20eat%20my%20whole%20ass%20Im%20taking%20her%20characters%20and%20making%20them%20gay%20and%20trans*

The fans' distaste towards Rowling, which joins the ongoing frustration, as mentioned by Jenkins (2006), with how the story was written brings forth an important question. How can any fandom that's not necessarily built on the source material, *but* flourished through fan fiction and the rebuilding of characters be transformative of the original author's work? If anything, the Marauders fandom is transformative of its self-production, its members taking headcanons that other writers bring to the world and putting their spin on them.

Each time new work is published on the Marauders, it is safe to say that the characters are further removed from Rowling's work, thus gaining a sort of independence from their existence in the original source, which many see as tarnished. These are no longer the same characters barely mentioned within the seven volumes: they have lives outside of barely being name-dropped once or twice, families, personalities, and motives for being the way Rowling wrote them. Thus, they are *transformed* as a result of the fans' frustration with how little information was provided by the original author of their beloved characters, and with how little sense their stories make.

Since fandoms rely heavily on fan fiction and pieces of fanart, one can easily reach the conclusion that this particular microfandom would be unable to exist within the bounds of the larger Harry Potter community were it not for the countless works written, drawn and published for free on archiveofourown, or shared on social media. Ultimately, they would be right, for the Marauders subfandom is not in a symbiotic relationship just with Rowling's work, but also, as stated previously, with its own work. What makes the fandom special is, in fact, its relationship with related pieces of published fics. It depends on them, feeds on each new headcanon that comes out, expanding the ideas that have been accepted.

With over 200,000 fanfics on ao3[9], the Marauders fandom cumulates new works every single day, aiding the ever-evolving "canon" of the era. Out of the almost 500,000 fics under the Harry Potter tag at the time of

9. Number of fanfics may be incorrect, as it is impossible to establish how many works are properly related to the Marauders, since Harry Potter himself and some of his fellow mates are included. The number is an estimate.

writing this article, the most kudos-ed work is a particular Marauders fanfic. *All the Young Dudes* (ATYD for short) is a half million words, canon-compliant fic following the life of Remus Lupin, pre-Hogwarts to 1995, a year before Sirius dies in canon. Not only is ATYD a favourite within the fandom, but it is the most popular work on archiveofourown, a feat worth mentioning, considering the total number of fics published on the archive.

For many people in the fandom, ATYD is akin to the source material, or, if anything, more important and *truer* than the actual canon. Others, however, underate ATYD: some find the characterisation to be off, just as with *The Shoebox Project* (2004), others see it as lacking in representation. Many headcanons presented in ATYD (Mary Macdonald as a white woman, James Potter as white too, Sirius - a womaniser and somewhat of a misogynist in the beginning) no longer fit the canon, despite the subsequent work published between 2017 and 2018.

The whole fandom is in a constant state of change, new headcanons being pushed to popularity every other day, which means that the transformative works posted during the peak of certain fanon ideas are sooner or later criticised for no longer being accurate. This is a somewhat negative perspective of this microfandom, something that may, in the end, prove to be the reason as to why the community might implode.

Canon vs Fanon

In his work, *Textual Poachers*, Jenkins proposes the idea of fans treating original source materials like "silly putty" (1992, 159), thus taking whatever they think may fit personal headcanons or narratives and moulding the canon to support their own beliefs. For many academics, fan fiction is tied to canon, or as Sheenagh Pugh puts it "... one thing all fanfiction has in common is the idea of the "canon", the source material accepted as authentic and, within the fandom, known by all readers in the same way that myth and folk-tale were once commonly known" (2005, 26). Yet, Pugh does note that for fan fiction writers "canon is a framework to write

against" (40), thus showcasing that between writers and canon there is a special relationship that is not as simple to define as some may think. Many writers' feelings towards canon can be ambivalent and labyrinthine to navigate, even from the writers' perspectives. Not only are there complex feelings regarding canon, but, as H. Porter Abbott writes, "narratives are by their nature riddled with gaps" (2002, 83), meaning that the fans' need to fill in the gaps is ultimately due to the source text being perceived as full of loopholes.

This is oftentimes a struggle in the Marauders fandom, given that the canon surrounding the characters involved is limited at best. In most cases, fans are grasping at straws trying to form a linear canon that can then be used to give the characters fitting headcanons. I find that this limitation, of which some may think as insufficient is, actually, one of the subfandom's strongest suits. Not only is it easier for fans to mould Rowling's world into whatever they deem proper, but it is also simpler for them to distance themselves from the source text. The fandom has reached a point where canon means truly nothing, the only pieces still accepted being names and basic information (James Potter wearing glasses, Lily Evans being a redhead, Remus Lupin having scars, for example), although even these are oftentimes ignored within the community.

Thomas defines the term fanon as "the process whereby material that is created as an addition or supplement to the canon becomes accepted and used by other fanfiction writers" (2007, 2). As stated, the Marauders fandom is built entirely on fanon. For this community, there is no need to analyse its relationship with the canon, as it is close to none. All that matters is what the fans have to say, how they interpret certain ideas or identities, and how the utopic set of characters can be changed to anyone's fancy. Fanon is achieved through collective comprehension, and, if need be, is regularly revised and updated. Thomas also mentions the rare, but still true instances, in which fanon bleeds into canon (2), an idea I will reiterate and apply specifically to the case of the Marauders.

As stated above, given that the microfandom contains little canon, it would be improper to say that headcanons and fanon have bled into it. Not

only is there almost no canon for them to bleed into, but Rowling herself has stopped publishing within the universe and has stopped being a fan of what the community has been doing with her work (headcanoning characters as transgender, queer, or as people of colour, all identities that Rowling did not include in her writings, at least not explicitly). Instead, it would be proper to say that while the fanon did bleed into the few bits of canon there are, the fandom is so united in reclaiming the Marauders from Rowling that it has simply turned a blind eye to the canon. Busse and Hellekson state the point perfectly when claiming that "fanon often creates particular details or character readings even though the canon does not fully support it - or, at times, outright contradicts it" (2006, 9).

Moreover, according to Deborah Kaplan, "[i]n the interpretive community of fandom, one individual's interpretation in a work of fan fiction can inform another fan's reaction to a later moment in the source text. Fans in a given community may accept as fact some of these shared interpretations and analyses. Thus fanon, the noncanonical knowledge about a source text, is the sum of the community's shared interpretive acts" (2006, 136). Some examples I have found include fans forgetting that certain details about the characters are fanon (Sirius' middle name being Orion, Remus being Welsh); trying to regulate each others' headcanons if they do not comply with the inside consensus (bullying for not writing Remus as a cane user in modern fics, shaming when providing one's own headcanon instead of the consensual one regarding a character's ethnic or racial background).

Representation and Identity in the Fandom

In *Politics for the Love of Fandom*, Ashley Hinck points out that "people who create, control and profit from popular culture (…) are often straight white men, resulting in disparate representation of POC[10], women, and LGBTQ people" (Hinck 2019, 67). While I agree with Hinck's take that most creators are, indeed, heterosexual white men, I think it is important to understand

10. People of colour.

that for the case presented in this article, Rowling is just as biased at offering representation as the aforementioned straight white men. Wendy Helsby states that representation "[i]s not only about viewing ourselves, but also about viewing others" (2019, 7). On a similar note, Marion Rana refers to the social psychological theory of identity construction where "the basic ingredient for identity construction is otherness" (2009, 16). Applying these ideas to Rowling's universe, where representation is, at times, lacking, if non-existent, the route that the fandom has taken comes as no surprise. The Harry Potter fandom, with its vast number of fanworks and perpetual presence in the online space, has created an inclusive community in which representation is something its authors or artists focus on. "Through prosumer fan labor, particularly creative works based on the originary text, fans can experiment with sexuality, socio-cultural issues, and issues of race and gender in the safe spaces of their (usually online) communities" (Jenkins 2006; Tosenberger 2008, qtd. in Seymour 2018). This would suggest that not only do fan spaces offer a sense of comfort for many, but they provide the only places in which many fans can find representations of themselves, their cultures, or their identities. Seeing as most of the diverse representation in Rowling's work consists in an Asian character named Cho Chang, a Black man named Kingsley Shacklebolt, and Dumbledore dubbed gay by Rowling without any explicit hints of his sexuality in her books, fans have taken Rowling's characters and repurposed them, just as Jenkins explained through the concept of "silly putty".

With this in mind, it is important to understand that Rowling did try to teach her readers how to fight against racism, inequality and discrimination. In her books (2000, 2003, 2007), Voldemort and his Death Eaters are a clear allegory for fascism and racism, with Voldemort a blood supremacist taking a stance against those that are not pure-blood wizards and witches. Remus' lycanthropy is also an allegory, this time of the HIV virus, many thinking of Remus as queer on this metaphor alone, although Rowling did not make any comments on fans finding her writing to be reminiscent of the struggles of HIV-infected gay men during the AIDS crisis. The faith of the house elves represents slavery, with Rowling assigning one of them

the role of a central character in the second book of the series, whom she liberates to become a leading character in the subsequent volumes. Indeed, Rowling did introduce sensitive issues into her works, yet representation and inclusivity were minimal. Only after a backlash from fans, did she state that Hermione Granger was Black or that Dumbledore was envisioned as gay.

Not finding oneself in Rowling's universe is what has led to the emergence of an inclusive community striving towards a greater goal. This is visible in the case of the Marauders, more so than in the subfandom focusing on the Golden Trio era of the series. Although the latter do write Hermione as Black in their works and, at times, Harry as being of Indian descent, the focus is on the queer identity of the characters, rather than on their racial or ethnic backgrounds. And while one cannot say that Golden Trio fans are racists who ostentatiously omit such representation, there is, nevertheless, a difference between the two microfandoms.

Racebending the Marauders

In 2009, during an interview, Junot Díaz discussed the lack of representation of minorities in media and compared it to how a vampire is unable to see their own reflection: "What I've always thought isn't that monsters don't have reflections in a mirror. It's that if you want to make a human being into a monster, deny them, at the cultural level, any reflection of themselves. And growing up, I felt like a monster in some ways. I didn't see myself reflected at all" (Donohue).

Fans of shows that either lack representation or provide harmful, stereotypical portrayals have started combatting this failure by creating their own depictions in fanarts, fan fiction works, and other fan-made media. Jessica Seymour explains the process of racebending a character: „These artists, in general, do not want to superficially change a character's race; they want to understand how race and cultural identity would affect the character's experience and how they see the world" (2018, 337). The

characters she is referring to are usually characters whose race does not define them, meaning they are, most often than not, white. There are also cases in which the character's race is simply not mentioned, like in the case of Hermione, who, Rowling succeeded in convincing the readers, was always meant to be a woman of colour. This situation, as presented, is a delicate one, considering that the author used Hermione's unruly hair as proof of her not being white, along with her being an advocate against slavery, a plot dropped by Rowling after the fifth book.

For Marauders fans, the process of racebending is far easier when compared to the Golden Trio fans, as they have little canon. This offers the community an advantage when it comes to pushing the characters away from the series they originated from. James Potter is Desi, Latino, Black, mixed race, anything but white, Evan Rosier and Pandora Lovegood are twins, and Black, Sirius and Regulus Black are often South-Asian. The sense of otherness that arises from the Marauders fandom can be *the* way for non-white fans to come together as a group and have a sense of identity within this community that may otherwise be unreachable in a fandom whose source text is predominantly white. Hogg and Vaughan believe that self-esteem is closely linked to the idea of social identity, stating that "by identifying with a group, the group's prestige and status in society attaches to one's self-concept" (2005, 143). Not having any character to identify with, when you, as a fan, are part of a fandom precisely to combat this sense of lacking, can lead to issues concerning self-worth. As Diaz put it, it leads to disassociating yourself from your own identity and, subsequently, to creating a sort of dehumanised self.

By having a more diverse cast and perspective when it comes to the Marauders, fans are able to not only be part of a group that shares their values and that can provide a sense of group identity in an otherwise predominantly white community, but it helps offer these fans the idea of belonging and constructing a safe space for themselves. At the time of writing this article, there were 844 works on ao3 tagged with "Desi James Potter", almost 150 works with "Asian Sirius Black" and "Asian Regulus Black" and while there is not a considerate number of fics tagged with "Black Evan Rosier", there is a general understanding and acknowledgement that Evan

is a man of colour. In respect of Harry, and by extension James, being Desi, Tumblr user spritzeal said: "and if harry is dark-skinned well [that] kind of explains why the uber-white middle class world of privet drive so easily accepted that this scrawny child in too-big clothes was a 'criminal' and 'disturbed' and why nobody called the goddamn police" (spritzeal 2015).

The most preferred process of racebending in the fandom, besides fanart, is fan casting. Fan casting means recasting an already existing character, an established book, etc., with one's own personal choices (Gilliand, 2016). For the case of this subfandom, before its resurgence during the COVID-19 pandemic that took place on TikTok, most of the fan casts were white actors, showcasing the failure of the community regarding representation. The interest surrounding the fandom in 2020 made this discrepancy more obvious, as more and more fans took to fan casting Reiky de Valk, a Dutch actor of Somali and Vietnamese descent, as young James Potter or singer Conan Gray, who is mixed Irish and Japanese, as Sirius.

Racebending as a form of creating representation offers fans a unique and self-crafted, "ethno-futurist" (Gilliand, 2016) space for those that are unable to see themselves in mainstream media, or for those that lack the depiction they desire. Thus, by portraying James as Desi, Evan and Pandora as Black, or Sirius and Regulus as Asian, fans can write parts of themselves into the story. Instead of, as browngirlsintherain on Tumblr says, "terrorists, thugs and mindless villains" (browngirlsintherain, 2013), they can be wizards, hockey players, musicians, or just normal people.

Queering the Marauders

In the same sense as Cromwell's statement about fan fiction being a "queer-friendly space", D.M. Fielding makes a similar remark in his study *Queernormative: Norms, values, and practices in social justice fandom*. Fielding argues that "fans have cultivated a space where queerness is the unmarked category: all characters are presumed queer" (2020, 16). Fielding's statement applies to all fandom spaces, and not just to the social justice fandom the

study is meant to refer to. Queerness is expected in fandom due to it being one of the only spaces where heterosexuality or cis-gendered identities are not the norm. If anything, being cishet in an online fandom space is being a minority.

Identifying as queer and experiencing lack of representation is something many fans deal with, just like non-white people have a hard time finding themselves in mainstream media. Identifying as queer and finding out that the author of your favourite childhood series does not believe in your rights to exist and that she is actively trying to be harmful towards your community is what some Harry Potter fans had to deal with. Because of Rowling's transphobic tweets, which have received considerable backlash from critics of her work and fans alike, several people that found comfort in this series felt that letting go of Harry Potter and the universe crafted by the author may be for the best. Others have been trying to separate the art from the artist, borrowing Barthes' idea of "the death of the author" (1977) and removing Rowling's ideology from the characters she created. These fans, which as mentioned previously are mostly queer, have also been trying to combat the author's transphobia by writing *all* characters from an LGBTQ+ perspective.

Identity in the Marauders fandom is very easy to achieve when remaking the characters, what with the aforementioned lack of canonical text and the fact that, as Aja Romano (Romano 2016) claims, characters like Sirius and Remus and even Nymphodora Tonks, Sirius' niece and Remus' later wife, are depicted subtextually as queer. Tonks, a character that can shift her appearance along with her gender, was thought to be a possibly genderfluid character, only to have her paired off with Remus after Sirius' death, a man thirteen years her senior who had previously shown no interest in female characters. Even Tonks' feelings for him come out of nowhere. Still, just like Sirius dies at the end of *Order of the Phoenix*, Tonks and Remus are also killed during the Hogwarts battle in the last book. I would like to engage the trope of "bury your gays", which Waggoner (2018) argues that it is due to the heteronormative dominance in media and a way through which creators are able to keep advertisers pleased. I invoke this

trope due to some fans seeing the relationship between Remus and Tonks as a lavender marriage, set on continuing to read both characters as gay.

In the fandom, Wolfstar is by far the most accepted queer ship (see above), as the relationship is the cornerstone of the community as a whole. Wolfstar not only has the most kudos-ed work on ao3, but it is the second most popular ship in the Harry Potter tag, only after Drarry, with almost 46,000 works. Because of this, tags like "Gay Sirius Black" and "Bisexual Remus Lupin" have thousands of fics. The most interesting approach that the Marauders fandom has to queerness is how, just like in the case of characters being predominantly white before 2020, most of them have been reworked into offering a broader sense of inclusivity and representation. One such example is James Potter, who in the past was written as an ally, sometimes even as a homophobe in Wolfstar fics to create drama, only for him to be now portrayed as pansexual or bisexual, the former having 1,200 fics, the latter almost 900. As a character whose main personality trait given by Rowling was his borderline obsession with trying to get Lily Evans, his wife in canon, to give him a chance, fans today do not erase his love of women, but instead recognise its importance in highlighting his bisexual/pansexual identity they are so fond of. Lily is also one to have her previous straightness erased in order to have her and James in a queer relationship, in spite of it appearing as a heterosexual one. There is a clear distinction between a straight relationship and a straight-presenting couple in which both partners identify as queer.

Fans are writing these queer-focused works due to their identity and their need to find representation in their favourite media, but also as a way to fight against Rowling's transphobia, best seen in the case of Regulus Black, Sirius' younger brother, who was a Death Eater but deserted Voldemort's cause and died at 18 trying to destroy one of his Horcruxes. Because of Regulus' canonical background, many works that included him and which were published in the past portray him as not only straight, but also sexist. In today's works, Regulus is no longer straight, nor sexist, but one of the fandom's favourite characters to join the struggle of being transgender. There are over 1,100 works tagged with "Trans Regulus Black"

and almost 1,500 with "Gay Regulus Black". Regulus is a perfect character for trans people to write their own struggles with gender as well as their familial problems that arise because of their gender identity. In the canon, Regulus is part of a pureblood family that is very strict and cares a lot about their societal status.

Creating a parallel to the racial representation, queer people often find themselves being overly sexualised in media, especially sapphics and trans men, a consequence of the patriarchal society that thinks of people who were assigned females at birth as only existing for the entertainment of males (Oliver 2017). Similarly, gay men are often written as mere accessories for straight girls (Hummel 2017), indicating that the media use queer people representations to target prevalently straight, non-queer consumers. In this subfandom, queer people can explore their own identities from a more personal perspective, written by themselves, for themselves. The female body is not objectified through the male gaze, the love between people is more intimate, perhaps truer than what is portrayed in current forms of media. Gay people can just be people within the works of this subfandom, works that are made by queer people, for queer people.

Conclusions

The Marauders fandom, within the broader Harry Potter community, stands as a testament to the transformative power of fan culture. Rooted in a meagre canon, in a love that has been tainted with anger and a failure of the author to deliver representation without baiting the queer or stereotyping the POC readers, the fandom has flourished by embracing both of these characteristics. It held onto the fanon and transformed the negative feelings towards Rowling into something that does not leave fans with a bitter taste. Fan communities often transcend the limited source material due to their collective understanding and interpretation of characters and their background stories. This particular subfandom exemplifies how fan communities can seize creative control and engage in the vital work of representation and identity construction.

In a world where the original text may fall short of offering diverse, inclusive perspectives, Marauders fans have taken the initiative to racebend and make characters queer, giving a more inclusive and representative vision of the fictional wizarding world. They have crafted new narratives that empower non-white and LGBTQ+ individuals, providing a safe and accepting space for those who might not otherwise find themselves reflected in mainstream media. The Marauders fandom thrives on the ethos of transformative works, where each fan-made creation pushes the characters further away from the source material, fostering a sense of ownership and shared identity among the community. Through fan fiction, fanart and fan casting, people not only expand the spectrum of representation but also offer a more nuanced, empathetic understanding of the characters' experiences.

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The Cult of Non-Conformity, Corroded? Subcultural Creed and Maturation in James Clavell's *To Sir, with Love* (1967) and Franc Roddam's *Quadrophenia* (1979)

NICOLETA-CYNTHIA BALEA

Abstract. Through this article, I attempt to analyse the maturation process of youths belonging to different subcultures, as reflected in British social realist films, with a view to outlining how factors such as precarity, a faulty familial background, and a strong desire for autonomy pushed the British young adult from industrial areas to the metropolis, from collectivism to individualism, from Ian Dury's 'Sex, Drugs and Rock 'n' Roll' to the Conservative Party's 1979 political slogan 'Labour Isn't Working.' Therefore, I shall provide an analysis of two Cult Classics, namely James Clavell's *To Sir, with Love* (1967) and Franc Roddam's *Quadrophenia* (1979), in order to present an alternative direction to the 'all or nothing' stance towards resisting society, proposed by the canonical Angry Young Man archetype.

Keywords: *To Sir, with Love, Quadrophenia, Angry Young (Wo)Men, Cult Classics, maturation, mods, rockers, youth subcultures*.

Introduction: A New Wave of Angry Young (Wo)Men

In an article titled "The 1960s: The Decade that Shook Britain," Kimberley Watson refers to *The Swinging Sixties* as "the defining decade for Britain", on account of the socioeconomic growth post-war London benefited from, thus sheltering the pretence of liberation, optimism, and infinite possibilities (Watson 2015). In a sense, the *big city* came to offer a veridical picture of societal progress, with improvements in terms of both personal and professional life; however, was this *Swinging* optimism insurmountable, or, quite the contrary, a mere *fresh* start? Despite the booming popularity Britain benefited from in the 1960s, on account of experimental music, bold fashion and the emergence of counterculture, the media's preoccupation with glamorising the decade as a time of financial prosperity, non-conformity and social empowerment derailed the public[1] from the grim post-war pessimism of the suburb to the promising nucleus of hope and liberation advanced by the metropolis (Watson 2015). Admittedly, the latter provided both employment opportunities and entertainment, which piqued the interest of the working-class youth already rejecting their malfunctioning household, in pursuit of independent living and micro-community validation.

To understand the *defining* character of 1960s' Britain enunciated afore means to observe the schism between the media and counterculture without affect, in order to subsequently comment on how the consequences of this rupture contributed towards the gradual, but certain emergence of non-conformity (Miles 2011) in the latter decades of the 20th century. The reason why I am referring to a *gradual* non-conformity is encapsulated in Robert Hewison's *Too Much: Art and Society in the Sixties 1960–75* (1986), where he problematises the yet diffuse profile of the Sixties' British youths as a form without substance, outlining the shocking, but limiting 'Sex, Drugs and Rock 'n' Roll' attitude they delivered as a purely stylistic, rather than politically-charged manifesto (Hewison 1986, 61). Hence, their "like-minded anti-establishment, anti-war" (Miles 2011) stance was

1. Referring to the so-called spectators of Britain's rapid progress in the 1960s, be they actual Brits or non-British, academics or non-academics, witnessing the phenomenon, or mere observers documenting the period itself.

fundamentally labouristic, but prudence and timid opinion formation prevented them from being vocal about their fragile[2] beliefs, as emphasised by Barry Miles in "Spirit of the Underground: The 60s Rebel" (2011):

> The counterculture was apolitical, as far as party politics was concerned because most politicians were seen as lying hypocrites, serving vested interests, not the people. However, it was active in issue-based campaigns: CND, which many of them were involved in during the early 60s, and the anti-Vietnam war campaign which grew out of that. After 1967 came environmental issues, the gay liberation front and the women's movement. (Miles 2011)

Towards the end of the decade, it was apparent that counterculture began to mature, with working-class activism surfacing as a pressing political statement[3]. The transition towards the 1970s proposed a detailed observation of the social justice advocated for in the previous decade, as well as of (counter)cultural diversity, owing to the research conducted by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham. Despite their initial limitations of rendering underground groups from a chiefly male-centred angle, as well as putting too much emphasis on stylistic expression, the scholars at the CCCS identified patterns of what would come to symbolise post-war subcultures[4] and criticised the media's radical response to the oppositional stance the members of these subcultures adopted towards the majority culture.

When looking at the manner in which British working-class subcultures from the 1960s onwards have been displayed on screen, the rather insufficient and controversial portrayal of working-class youth advanced by the media should be thrown into question. Authentic examples of

2. That is, novel and poorly-argued.
3. Working-class activism includes print culture as a key component of the Women's Liberation Movement against the male-dominated publishing industry in the Sixties, the revolutionising impact of the Gay Liberation Front manifesto of 1971, advocating for gay rights and criticising heteronormative gender roles, and, towards the mid-1970s, even the Rock Against Racism movement.
4. With their most notable ones being the Teddy Boys, the Mods, the Rockers, and the Punks.

Angry Young (Wo)Men from industrial towns rejecting their dissatisfactory condition (Seino 2010, 4-5) as economically-dependent workers are to be found in the "'kitchen sink' social realism of the 1960s, through to the socially purposeful art cinema of the 1980s and the so-called 'Brit-Grit' of the 1990s" (Lay 2007, 232). Although having been attacked by scholars and film critics alike for its predictability, limited cinematic imagination and heavy documentary attitude (Leach 2004, 51), the latter stages of the 1960s' British New Wave proposed a novel direction for social realism, from its initial low-budget attempt at documenting the precarious individual's aversion to society, to a rather pricey, but successful rendering of the individual's amassing into a post-Thatcherite laissez-faire economic system.

Through this article, I attempt to analyse the maturation process of youths belonging to different subcultures, as reflected in British social realist films, with a view to outlining how factors such as precarity, a faulty familial background, and a strong desire for autonomy pushed the British young adult from industrial areas to the metropolis, from collectivism to individualism, from 'Sex, Drugs and Rock 'n' Roll' to 'Labour Isn't Working'[5]. Therefore, I shall provide an analysis of two Cult Classics, namely James Clavell's *To Sir, with Love* (1967) and Franc Roddam's *Quadrophenia* (1979), in order to present an alternative direction to the 'all or nothing' stance towards resisting society proposed by the canonical Angry Young Man archetype.

The interest in this subject developed as a result of having studied multiple British Cult films[6] screening the route of the defeated individual in connection with precarity as an inherent working-class struggle that persisted even after the 1960s. In order to broaden this pre-existent interest, I propose a convincing decoupage of British social realist films, based on which I will apply the hypothesis that the so-called *delinquent* juvenile profile is to be contextualised and, consequently, explained as a prevalent response to economic factors, household attributions, the need

5. The Conservative Party's political slogan for the 1979 general election.
6. Apart from the four Cult Classics mentioned afore, the films in question are *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960), *If…* (1968), *Kes* (1969), *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975), *Tommy* (1975), and *Withnail and I* (1987).

for independence, or all at once. Provided the topic of this paper, as well as its main research objectives, I do not intend to comment on whether the British working-class youths were either laudable or damnable in their spirited attempts at surviving ordinary life.

Seems so Long Ago, Youth…

While the impact of the Sixties in terms of fuelling social action amid different youth cults emerged as a prominent call for change, especially among the DIY countercultural scene, the outcome of the ever-growing consumerism began to manifest itself, reaching its pinnacle[7] towards the late 1970s / early 1980s, with the most affected cult group being the Punks. The subcultural commodification that reverberated through other youth cults was related to the media's capitalisation of subcultural fashion, to the detriment of their identities and creeds washed off by the desire to produce and consume cultural products. Although the *Swinging Sixties* proposed more libertine attitudes when it came to redefining social norms, especially since the Labour Government was in charge of running the country, these aspects still did not manage to change the general class-consciousness of the labourers and the racist sentiment of the British Labour Market. To use Street's terms, the "rampant hedonism" of the decade was a mere facet of the opposing political attitudes encountered on a national level, with contrasting attitudes towards work ethic, racial issues and immigration being the most controversial topics. Street equally emphasises the dichotomy between 'regionalism' and 'metropolitan centralism' through the Scottish Nationalist revival criticising London as the flourishing metropolis attracting youths into fulfilling financial independence (Street 1997, 77).

Quite evidently, the critical economic conditions of post-war Britain were not frowned upon by the labourers only. The collective sense of working-class solidarity did not solely concern the wage stagnation of

7. In what concerns the said *pinnacle*, I mean, of course, the most referential point for consumerism on the timespan between the 1960s and the 1970s, as these are the decades under observation in this analysis.

individuals pursuing physical labour. The emergent authors of the time were equally preoccupied with the unstable financial status of writing, on a par with expressing their contempt towards consumerism and class inequality, which led to a rise of Marxist ideological thought among the labourites. The original framework in which the Angry Young Men movement was developed dates back to the 1950s, with this chiefly male-centred group of anti-establishment young British authors' aim to address, through their writing, the precarity faced by individuals from working-class backgrounds in the post-war era. As the emphasis was put on the unstable economic status of Britain after World War II, which affected employment opportunities, issues such as dysfunctional families, intergenerational conflicts and parental divorce came second, but were equally reflective of the socioeconomic rupture produced by the war, and were, therefore, addressed in their writings. Despite the fact that the novels written by the Angry Young Men do not constitute the essential topic of this paper, I think it is imperative to point out the interdependence between literature and film as fundamental for the rise of British social realist cinema, as is the case with Allan Sillitoe's short-story, *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner* (1959), which was screened three years later by Tony Richardson and was coined "one of the landmark films of British New Wave" (Scovell 2022).

Even though the 'kitchen sink' realism of the films centring around the daily lives of the Angry Young Men has been continuously criticised as a mainstream, all-too-familiar rendition of real-life issues screened in a documentary manner, I find these observations rather superfluous. The reason why I am adopting such a definite stance towards the regurgitated viewpoint that British social realist films were *too realistic* is that I am evaluating the Marxist dimension of these films, as advanced by John Hill's *Sex, Class and Realism: British Cinema 1956–1965* (1986). Hill proposes a clapback to critics like Durgnat and Armes, who consider the New Wave limiting, in that, despite its attempts at capturing reality with the naked eye, it nevertheless provides an 'outsider's view' of the recorded events. His response consists of a clarification as regards the insignificance of the film-makers' backgrounds, contrasted by the essentiality of the "poetry"

and "marks of enunciation" imperative to "the distance between observer and observed" (Hill 1986, 133). While Hill's observations are relevant when it comes to offering a contextualisation of the technical and the 'poetic' elements (Aldgate and Richards 1999, 189) of the films he proposes as examples[8], I find his acceptation of the metaphorical reading of the cinematic lens provided by social realist film-makers rather monotonous. Hill insists on the beautification of 'classical expository cinema' (Hill 1986, 133) in his analysis of two Free Cinema films, a glamourisation which definitely did not pertain to the core characteristics and intentions of the New Wave cinema.

In the 1970s, the preoccupation with youth subcultures and their lifestyle was delineated under a more encompassing cinematic category that arose in popularity – the cult film. Back then, the cult, or the *social family* referenced afore, was pretty difficult to regard as independent of "a secular, consumption-based culture" (Smith 2010, 1); when it comes to the most basic acceptation of it, the term 'cult' is rather generic, as it implies "a critical label applied across a wide range of popular media: cult films, cult TV, cult books, cult fashion, cult music, cult bands, cult personalities and so on" (Smith 2010, 3). Touching on cult representations in cinematic productions, the idiosyncratic cult fashion, music and the consecrated cult character archetypes catch the viewer's attention, thus proposing a shift from the bleak commonness of the previous 1960s New Wave productions.

In this respect, we are to notice a particular subcultural maturation, understood as the gradual evolution of subcultures, from general to specific, from incipient to concrete. In my analysis of the two films, the coming-of-age process shall be addressed as an essential concept, not only because it is reflective of the advancement of countercultural diversity, but also because it emerges as a consequence of this new generation of Angry Young (Wo)Men's erratic behaviour.

Not looking at different subcultural groups through a pathologising lens merely represents the tip of the iceberg as compared to other aspects the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) failed to tackle,

8. Those being, in fact, examples of Free Cinema – *Every Day Except Christmas* (1957) and *O Dreamland* (1953).

among which the motivation behind these groups' core values, the "oppressive aspects of adolescent masculinity" and the marginal representation of women (Weiner 2015, 16) are to be mentioned. The reason for my reservation towards the limited nature of their research is to be explained by returning to Hill's argument I criticised afore. Neither party – be they the Birmingham researchers or Hill himself – proposed a viable alternative to gender *inequity*, which persisted as an obviously impactful phenomenon well into the 1970s. Hence, the films continued to present subcultures from a preponderantly male-centered angle, with female protagonists not developing a character arc as complex as their male counterparts, even though "there *were* original female teds, mods, skinheads and so on, with their own feminized take on subcultural ensembles" (Weiner 2015, 16). However, a more comprehensive picture of female subcultural representation is featured in the films *To Sir, with Love* (1967) and *Quadrophenia* (1979), through their distinctive examples of tenacious women challenging the authority of the male figures surrounding them.

As previously accounted, the 1970s constitute just as turbulent a period as the *Swinging Sixties*, with issues such as economic instability, racial discrimination and challenging notions about gender, class and normativity resurfacing into society, their manifestations consequently becoming more violent during this decade. Besides the experienced economic inequality, youth culture underwent a harsh recontextualization, due to being faced with gender and racial issues that fractured the sense of community – a key component of cult construction. In this respect, in *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera* (quoted in Street 1997, 88-89), Kaplan offers valuable insights into the pressing struggles mentioned afore, as she underlines that

> […] race was developing into one of the most acutely divisive issues in Britain in the 1970s, with the racist National Front frequently attacking ethnic minorities and their supporters. […] it is important to signal the persistence of racial conflict, a stark continuity with previous decades. […] As far as gender relations were concerned[,] the second wave of feminism, which was becoming

> increasingly vociferous, exacerbated masculinist anxieties about women in the workforce and the erosion of traditional family values. These broad social and economic conditions formed the backdrop of British genre production which continued to offer a pertinent guide to shifts in social anxieties and behaviour, if not as obviously as in previous decades when more films were made and there was greater continuity of production.

Obviously, these transformations affected film-making to a great extent, as portraying what had once been New Wave canon was no longer applicable; therefore, a refashioning of the former realist tradition implied screening the local and the global concomitantly, in order to observe the interplay between the two.

Rebellion as an Act of Resistance: An Analysis of *To Sir, with Love* (1967) and *Quadrophenia* (1979)

When it comes to elaborating on the idea that the epicentre of early British New Wave films – "the 'kitchen sink' dramas of these 'Angry Young Men'" (Aldgate and Richards 1999, 187) – serves as a solid foundation for the upcoming realist productions of the last decades of the 20th century, looking at authentic examples of cult films from the targeted timespan proves essential, in that not only do we find similar tropes and character archetypes, but we also observe the manner in which these film particularities have evolved throughout the years.

Although, at first glance, the two cult classics, *To Sir, with Love* (1967) and *Quadrophenia* (1979), might appear to be reunited only under the 'cult' attribute, in fact, the films follow the very same pattern when it comes to character evolution. However, picking on the subcultural undertones of the films in question, we are to notice that the most apparent common denominator consists of the fact that they are both Youth Cult films, proposing different subcultural archetypes, such as the mod (e.g. Sir Mark Thackeray's pupils, Jimmy and his group of friends in *To Sir, with Love*), the rocker (e.g.

Kevin and his squad in *Quadrophenia*), the heroin chic(k) (e.g. Monkey in *Quadrophenia*), etc. Quite evidently, the classification of these subcultures into sub-subcultures would prove to be a rather exhaustive exercise, taking into account the subcultural varieties that emerged in Britain between the late 1960s and the mid-to-late 1970s, as well as the constant interconnectivity between them, which resulted into hybrid spaces of intersection. However, the reason for partitioning the main characters as such is that it offers a better perspective as regards their outlining.

Onto providing a subcultural classification of the youths we encounter in the films, it is quite relevant to observe that, while *Quadrophenia* (1979) centers around the way in which a working-class subculture is represented in the politico-economic context of the time, *To Sir, with Love* (1967) portrays merely quintessential elements, such as specific music or fashion items, as the subcultural context, although relevant, does not constitute the main focus of the plot. Therefore, the mods in *Quadrophenia* emerge as the most individualised ones, as prevalently reflected through the side-wings haircut worn by lads and ladies alike, irrespective of their gender, and the rhythmic jazzy tunes they were dancing to, as genuine constituents of the mod subculture between 1965 and 1966. As opposed to *To Sir, with Love*, which only manages to render the mod subculture by familiarising the viewer with an insight into the pupils' revels and style, *Quadrophenia* proposes an obvious insight into what being a mod implies, thus acquainting us with the mods' entire subcultural repertoire of self-defining elements, from their bedrooms to the cafeteria they frequent, from their pre-drinking meetups to their after-parties, from their frugal living to their contempt for the rockers. Therefore, we are met not only with their pastimes and interests, but also with the internal vs. external, individual vs. collective, pro- vs. anti- struggles that occupy their mundane existence. On the other hand, the rocker typology, equally present in both films, although unevenly developed, emerges as visibly less chiselled and cheeky than the mod one, with examples such as Denham[9] and Kevin[10] representing very macho, mop-topped hair impersonations of *top-tier*[11] masculinity.

9. From *To Sir, with Love* (1967).
10. From *Quadrophenia* (1979).
11. Used sarcastically.

In what follows, I shall focus on the sense of community that is prevalent as far as both James Clavell's *To Sir, with Love* and Franc Roddam's *Quadrophenia* are concerned, in order to emphasise the role of the 'cult' in respect to the main character(s)' maturation process. One relevant observation, however, is that, although I am interested in the development of the protagonists' character arcs, this section shall comprise an in tandem analysis of the two youth cult groups, with a view to outlining the (d)evolution of subcultural creed and practices as a decisive factor regarding these teenagers' comings-of-age.

Both *To Sir, with Love* and *Quadrophenia* are similar in their depiction of mod subculture, in that they acquaint the audience with a well-rounded insight into core-defining elements of self-expression, such as music and style, through which the characters are individualised as belonging to the said subcultural group. Secondary to the mod subculture, the rocker 'tribe' is presented in contrast to the mod subgroup, with the conflict between the two being heavily exhibited towards the ending of *Quadrophenia*. The antipathetic nature of the self-important rebel rocker, however, is portrayed accurately in *To Sir, with Love*, through Denham's audacity and short-temper. Needless to say, his attributes are not to be applied to *all* rockers. For instance, Kevin, the *Quadrophenia* rocker, displays in the beginning a friendly attitude towards his old friend, Jimmy. The latter a mod, rejects him on account of being a rocker, by leaving the canteen he was having lunch in as soon as other mods walk in and see them sitting together (Roddam 1979, 00:11:08 to 00:11:28). Nevertheless, despite the aversion between the mods and the rockers being mostly principial – that is, consisting of a clash of beliefs as far as masculinity, cultural values, and styles are concerned – it is important to note how the so-called differences that set them apart as distinct subcultures are obliterated when it comes to the aggressive means of rioting both groups resort to in Brighton, the legal consequences of their actions notwithstanding. Therefore, as much as one group insists on being superior to the other in terms of their (sub) cult(ural) affiliation, neither of them proposes a less violent alternative to solving or, at least, mediating their conflict, which, essentially, makes them

more similar than they anticipated. Conversely, *To Sir, with Love* proposes a communal sense that evades the borders of subcultural antipathy between the students at North Quay Secondary School, with conflicts between them arising mostly due to over-the-top banter and discussions about gender roles/attributions.

When it comes to the manner in which both films portray women, we can notice a discrepancy between the marginal position they occupied in previous New Wave productions, and the vocal, justice-driven stance of the especially younger generations on screen that was starting to surface as an implicit call to action. Thereby, we are met with examples in *To Sir, with Love* such as Pamela, who defends Sir from the racial slurs addressed by her ignorant colleagues (Clavell 1967, 00:54:45 to 00:55:45), Lulu, who teaches her male peers a lesson in respect and gallantry (Clavell 1967, 00:37:38 to 00:37:50), or Steph (*Quadrophenia*), who ridicules Jimmy's immaturity and wishful thinking, ultimately rejecting him (Roddam 1979, 01:36:49 to 01:37:59). Onto providing a more in-depth analysis of the two films, I propose a closer look at both *To Sir, with Love* and *Quadrophenia*, in order to address the underlying issues reflective of deviant youth behaviour as an essential characteristic pertaining to the dramatic realism of the two productions.

The reason why Sir and his students need to be regarded as stand-alone characters is motivated by the desire to provide an alternative interpretive angle to the already-consecrated acceptation of *To Sir, with Love* as the story of a 'wannabe-engineer teacher struggling with a senior class of rapscallions, but eventually managing to get to their liking,' by amateur film review sites, such as *Rotten Tomatoes* or *The Grand Cinema*. In defending this argument comes Roger Shouse, who, in "Taking Lulu Seriously: What We Can Learn from *To Sir, with Love*" (2005), emphasises that

> [o]n first viewing, one may fall into the trap of perceiving [the] plot [of the film] as relatively trite or unrealistic, e.g. a story of teacher Mark Thackeray's struggle and eventual success at winning the respect and affection of a class of rebellious working

> class senior students in a rundown east side London school. But while this description fits in a nutshell, it obscures the fact that the film is really a cluster of stories and meanings that emerge and interact over the course of the film. (Shouse 2005, 358)

Therefore, if we consider the plot by focusing on Sir's merits, thus glorifying him as a praise-worthy teacher, despite him not holding the qualifications, nor wanting to pursue it as a future career (at least initially), we risk overlooking the students' gradual, but certain evolution. Needless to say, their stepping into maturity was not curriculum driven; envisioning themselves as competent adults was inherently fuelled by the change in perspective Sir proposed that they should not be regarded as children anymore, but as adults taking full responsibility for their actions. To be emphasised, in this respect, is Mrs Clinty's infantilising attitude towards the seniors' mischief -

> Mrs Clinty: Mark. Couple of things, Mark. We all know the old man's views. And basically, we agree with them. But he's safe in an office. Now these *kids* come from homes where an order's usually accompanied by a blow. One rude word to their parents, the roof will hit 'em. There's nothing like that going on here, right? So, they've got us at a great disadvantage. Hackman tried to be popular. He hung himself. Weston couldn't care less about them, and that's no good. I can't guide you, but... Don't take any nonsense from these *little tykes*. They're good *kids*, Mark. Most of them. But if you don't solve 'em, they'll break you, and damn quickly. (Clavell 1967, 00:17:07 to 00:18:04)

– contrasted by Sir's assertiveness –

> Mr Thackeray: I suddenly realised that you are not children, that you will be adults in a few weeks, with all the responsibilities that implies. So, from now on, you will be treated as such, by me and by each other. As adults, responsible adults. Next, we

> are going to be reasonable with each other. We are just going to talk, you and I. You are going to listen without interruption, one of you may have your say without interruptions. (Clavell 1967, 00:31:46 to 00:32:14)

Evidently, Mrs Clinty attempts at providing Mr Thackeray with valuable advice with regard to how he should interact with the seniors, so they do not undermine his authority as a teacher. She proceeds by emphasising how other fellow colleagues have failed in their class management, thus implying that Sir ought to impose himself more assertively. Although essentially good-natured, Mrs Clinty's advice fails to capture the root of the students' erratic behaviour – their no-longer-pubescent stage. Even though the behaviours they exhibit are puerile in nature, their pranks and raucousness are reflective of their mawkish camaraderie, which pervades even the instances in which they are required to be self-controlled. Conversely, the practical solution of treating them as mature individuals, responsible for their actions, proves to be rather efficient, as it shows, on the long run, that the students have developed a more compassionate and well-rounded view of social responsibility. Admittedly, they equally enjoy being treated respectfully, an attitude which is to be reflected towards the ending of the film, when they dedicate Mr Thackeray the song "To Sir, with Love", sung by Lulu.

One particularly important aspect as far as underlining cult construction in *To Sir, with Love* is concerned consists of the setting in which the students meet. Given that they have been individualised since the beginning of the film as *the seniors*, a great part of their identity is related to their educational environment, as there are literally no other contexts in which the viewer observes them interacting with each other. Although not emerging as a united class collective, provided some of the colleagues' minimal to zero involvement in both class banter and discussions with Mr Thackeray, the students start to mobilise once they observe that Sir is not, in fact, opposing them. Despite that they are perceived as naggish, due to their disobedient behaviour and petty pranks, the seniors do, actually,

possess a wisdom beyond their age as regards their understanding of *being an adult*, which is equally reflected in their frequent instances of challenging Mr Thackeray to debates:

> **Ingham:** What did you mean the other day about rebellion, sir?
> **Mr Thackeray:** Change. Take your hairstyles. That's a form of rebellion, isn't it?
> **Student:** Aye? What, sir?
> **Mr Thackeray:** Don't you just do it to be different from adults? Isn't that the reason?
> **Student:** Well, they messed up the world a bit, haven't they, sir?
> **Lulu:** You can say that again.
> **Mr Thackeray:** So, you rebel. Even the way you dress is a form of rebellion, now, isn't it?
> **Lulu:** Oh, it's just a new fashion, Sir. 'Course the adults look proper stupid in our gear.
> **Pamela:** Do you think it's wrong to change, to be different, to rebel, sir?
> **Mr Thackeray:** It is your duty to change the world, if you can. Not by violence – peacefully, individually, not as a mob. (Clavell 1967, 00:39:39 to 00:40:21)

In what concerns their desire to be different and express themselves, the seniors are encouraged to do so, as long as they have inspiring role-models, in this respect, such as The Beatles (Clavell 1967, 00:40:21).

As far as tackling rebellion, treating these youths as who they are to become, and not as who they should not be, whilst equally respecting their autonomy, emerges as an adequate alternative when it comes to forming young characters. Needless to say, the so-called 'delinquent brats' of *Quadrophenia* do not 'change the world' through their irresponsible behaviour. Despite the fact that the cult itself equates their lifestyle, which is respectable, provided the "mod revival" (Weiner 2015, 17) they propose, prior to the 1980s commodification of subcultures, their motives do not exceed the

flaky rebelliousness of the rockers or other subcultures that monopolised revelry and drug consumption to an early (metaphorical) grave, translated as the death of the respective cultural movements.

Another key point with respect to the parallelism between the two films consists of the manner in which the familial unit is portrayed. While in *To Sir, with Love*, the seniors' parents are more preoccupied with the students' *education*, and not with their maturation, in *Quadrophenia*, Jimmy's parents possess a rather limited understanding of non-violent upbringing, thus shown through Mr Cooper's unspecialised diagnosis he assigns his son –

> **Mr Cooper:** I'll tell you, you're schizophrenic, you are.
> **Jimmy:** What's that then, eh?
> **Mr Cooper:** I'll tell you. It's somebody like you, who doesn't know where his mind [is]. Bloody split personality. Half your mother's family were the same. That's where you get it. (Roddam 1979, 00:39:20 to 00:39:38)

– on a par with Mrs Cooper's constant nagging at Jimmy's expression as a mod – "Ridin' about on them motorbikes all night, I'm not surprised. *It's not normal"* (*Quadrophenia* 00:25:19 – 00:25:24). The unhealthy power dynamic within the household urges Jimmy to find solace in escapist practices that would provide him with the cult's validation. When mentioning escapism, it is important to note that we are not referring to the mere rejection of society, with a view to indulging in revelry and petty shenanigans for the lack of an apparent reason, as Jimmy cares to demonstrate; it is this fleeing towards the periphery – the recreational seaside of Brighton – that Jimmy Cooper succumbs to, with a view to pausing everydayness and enacting his romanticised visionary vanities. To be observed, in this sense, is the manner in which the seaside emerges as a whimsical space, allowing the character to indulge in a pensive state. Contrary to Lay's observation, according to which the seaside serves as a space "from where these [contemporary social life] issues are seen to emanate" (Lay 239), we are inclined to believe that it rather pauses and postpones the aforementioned problems, thus permitting an insight into the

characters' innermost beliefs and convictions as they (re)surface. However, Lay proceeds on expanding her argument, by outlining the stylistic function of the seaside, as it equally results from *Quadrophenia* (1979):

> British social realist films have overwhelmingly been set in inner city and industrialised towns. The seaside as landscape and setting has certainly been part of a social realist poetics in previous films, but scenes in which the seaside were featured were inevitably ancillary to the whole meaning of the film, rather than pivotal locations. The seaside as landscape has a number of meanings and uses: it can signify freedom and welcome relief from the pressures of home, a longing for escape, a site of melancholic personal reflection or as a site for the dashing of high hopes. To varying degrees, films as diverse as *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (Richardson 1962)[,] *A Taste of Honey* (Richardson 1961), *Letter to Brezhnev* and *Quadrophenia* (Roddam 1979) have all drawn on the poetic qualities of the seaside as landscape and setting. (Lay 2007, 239-240)

In a similar vein to the observations made afore, Samantha Lay proposes a symbolical analysis of the seaside as a space which caters for the individual's solitude and introspection, as well as for the rethinking and recontextualization of their values and creeds.

With the mods' arrival in Brighton, Jimmy receives his 'five minutes of fame' as a chief figure of their group, becoming nearly *as cool as* Ace Face. His enthusiasm dissipates shortly, as his attraction for Steph grows stronger, which leads to him fleeing the riot between the mods and the rockers, in order to pursue his romantic interest. However, the triggering of the riot emerges as a critical point in what concerns the evolution of the film, as it signifies a key moment in which several characters experience a shift of paradigm, especially after being faced with the tribunal. Unfortunately, the Brighton experience was not as eye-opening for Jimmy as it was for Steph, who, unto rejecting him, points at his puerile, will-o'-the-wisp aspirations:

> **Jimmy:** It's just… It seems like everything's going backwards. That's all. Steph?
> **Steph:** You sure it's not you who's going backwards?
> **Jimmy:** No, it's just… I can't think straight, that's all. I mean, nothing seems right, apart from Brighton. I mean, Brighton was ok, going to court with the Ace and that. I was a mod there, you know? I mean, that's somethin', innit, eh?
> **Steph:** Oh, what are you talking about?! Brighton was a laugh, that's why we went down there. It was a giggle, that's all.
> **Jimmy:** Oh yeah? And me and you, then? Was that just a giggle?
> **Steph:** Oh, what do you think?! Alright, so, I fancied you. We had it off. But that don't mean nothin', does it?
> **Jimmy:** Well, it did to fuckin' me!
> **Steph:** Well, I can't help that, Jimmy, can I? (Roddam 1979, 01:36:53 to 01:37:39)

With her being significantly more level-headed than he is, Steph outlines the fault in Jimmy's wishful thinking as an act of immaturity on his side, whilst criticising him for attaching such a great meaning to an event as foolish as the Brighton riot. It appears that Jimmy's decoupling from London to Brighton only deepened his 'true cult' creed concerning what being a mod implies. Brighton surfaces as a geographical mark with quite a lasting impact on Jimmy's psyche, which makes it absolutely necessary for him to return to the seaside, in order to bring closure over his initiation. Although excited to visit Ace Face in Brighton, an encounter for which he prepared, judging by his apparel and makeover, Jimmy is met with the devastating image of a 'bell boy' instead of a visionary cult leader, which shatters his expectations of and devotion to the cult.

With these last points in mind, I shall conclude this analysis of the *outcast* as a prevalent archetype in *To Sir, with Love* and *Quadrophenia*, by outlining the manner in which precarity, class consciousness, and an underprivileged (familial) background come to favour a passive, non-responsive attitude towards addressing personal struggles, and co-occurring levels of dysfunctionality, all of which may hinder the protagonists from overcoming their limitations.

Concluding Remarks

James Clavell's *To Sir, with Love* and Franc Roddam's *Quadrophenia* are two films which, although set a decade apart, fall within the borderless genre of British social realism, by advancing a strikingly similar portrayal of the defiant youthful spirit, on a par with the imprudent practices the protagonists resort to upon experiencing the cyclicity of everyday life. By juxtaposing the two, I intended to provide a well-rounded contextualisation of these Angry Young (Wo)Men's precarious background, as an essential class-related struggle. Onto understanding the protagonists' rebellious stance, an unstable familial nucleus, financial insecurity, and the sense of belonging are to be mentioned. The individual's decision to turn their back on society – experienced as a corrupt and prejudiced system – is a reaction indicative of the youth's instability during a decade thought of as "defining" for Britain. Hence, the young adult opts for embracing *the* social family, rather than the biological one, at least until the turning point of maturation.

This study of *To Sir, with Love* and *Quadrophenia* looks at less addressed issues that escape the amateur film enjoyer's attention, as generalities concerning most of the protagonists' status as delinquent drug-addicts, or the reduction of subcultures to their mere stylistic expression did not flag my enthusiasm. It is through this constant deviance-coercion doubling that notions such as oppression/resistance resurface. Through the research conducted, this study provides new theoretical directions as far as the Angry Young (Wo)Men's naturally emergent rebellion surfaces under socioeconomic pressure. This study also addresses the constant interplay between identity and geography, leading to the construction of multiple hybrid spaces, observations which account for a more inclusive and less pathologising acceptation of the regurgitated 'irreparable deviant youth.'

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A Meme Worth a Thousand Words? A Jakobsonian Analysis of Brexit Cat Memes

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Abstract. The present article aims to explore how political memes realise Roman Jakobson's (1960) functions of language. This is achieved by means of a stylistic analysis of a selection of memes pertaining to the #CatsAgainstBrexit movement, posted on Twitter (now X) prior to the Brexit referendum. Employing a primarily semiotic approach but also drawing on previous scholarly efforts in the field of mimetics, this paper demonstrates that memes fulfil Jakobson's functions of language through a melange of linguistic and pictorial aspects. Given that linguistic and visual elements combine in the emergence of meaning, this paper shows that a change of terminology is necessary when talking about the phatic and the metalinguistic functions especially. These functions, I argue, are realised in ways particular to memes alone, due to the significance of the visual elements enhancing the linguistic meaning. Finally, I make the case that the ability of memes to realise Roman Jakonson's linguistic functions is a key factor in the formation of group identity and solidarity.

Keywords: *Brexit, #CatsAgainstBrexit, functions of language, group identity, political memes*

Introduction

Memes have become a staple of Internet culture and communication, a creative and light-hearted way for people to share beliefs and ideologies stylized in the form of jokes and cultural references. The multimodal nature of image-based memes, which combine both linguistic and pictorial elements, makes them highly condensed yet impactful vessels of meaning, which may be met with solidarity or opposition by audiences. The effectiveness of memes in conveying meaning is perhaps why moments of political crisis give rise to an abundance of memes that are assiduously shared, replicated and re-created over a short amount of time. Thus, memes may even be used in dialogic contexts, becoming instrumental in political debates between opposing parties or factions. The present paper argues that their usage by prosumers who wish to critique or advocate for certain political beliefs or ideologies entails the existence of a complex communicative model, in which the interplay between language and images gives rise to sophisticated speech acts. However, in the context of politically-driven memes, in which rhetoric plays a crucial role, it is important to distinguish the various mechanisms by which these meme-based (or mimetic / memetic) speech acts fulfil their desired purposes, and to establish whether the linguistic or the visual representation prevails. This study seeks to demonstrate that politically engaged memes elicit an audience response and enable the expression of group solidarity because they exhibit an adapted version of Roman Jakobson's communication model (1960), in which different communicative functions are achieved through both linguistic and visual elements. The main assumption is that the communicative model pertaining to memes thus builds on Jakobson's model of verbal communication (1960), while also reconfiguring the ways in which certain functions of language are achieved, allowing for the *melange* between linguistic and visual elements. Drawing on Limor Shifman's conceptualization of memetic "stance" (2014, 40) as a reflection of particular Jakobsonian (1960) functions of language, I aim to explore the ways in which a specific subgroup of Brexit cat memes were capable of generating

a context for dialogue and an expression of group membership through the fulfilment of one or more of Jakobson's communicative functions. This shall be realised by means of a stylistic analysis of a selection of these memes. Additionally, the Jakobsonian analysis suggested by Shifman (2014, 37-54) will be situated within the semiotic approach, with a focus on the interdependence between the textual and the visual components in the emergence of meaning, as theorised by Jed R. Brubaker (2008, 120). This theoretical framing facilitates the demonstration of the fact that in the case of memes, communicative functions are not achieved only on a linguistic scale; the visual aspect of memes complements the linguistic layer, as some of the functions which we traditionally associate with language depend on the interplay between text and image. Since Jakobson's communication model (1960) is social, and communication is envisaged as taking part in an interactive setting, it also falls within the scope of this research to explore how the various communicative functions exhibited by these political memes contribute to building a sense of group membership. The memes chosen are part of the #CatsAgainstBrexit movement, which took place on Twitter, now known as X. Given that this paper was written before the platform's name change, this study will use the name "Twitter" throughout. In the days leading up to the Brexit Referendum, Twitter users posted pictures of their cats in various hypostases, each accompanied by a caption which humorously highlights "the cat's" attitude towards Brexit. Although the selection is not very broad, it is representative of the spirit of the movement, of what this movement was trying to achieve. The #CatsAgainstBrexit movement concentrates on Internet "tribes", sharing the ideologies of Remainers and Leavers. The phenomenon was initially driven by the "Remain" ideology, and fairly soon it was adapted by Leavers to suit their own political beliefs. Such memes have become an expression of group membership and political ideology. Thus, through a clever blend of linguistic and visual input, these meme-Tweets convey different sets of community values, whose understanding in a sociolinguistic context largely depends on the ways in which users manipulate the mimetic content in order to achieve the desired communicative functions.

Research Objectives

Striving for a comprehensive view of the processes by which memes fulfil Roman Jakobson's functions of language, this study is steered by a number of aims. The primary goal of this research is to establish that, through the integration of both linguistic and visual components, Brexit cat memes adapt Roman Jakobson's functions of language. In other words, memes resort to both linguistic and meme-specific mechanisms for fulfilling the referential, expressive, conative, phatic, poetic and metalingual functions of language (Jakobson 1960). Thus, this paper strives to substantiate that the very nature of memes (as cultural products which transgress a purely linguistic representation, emerging as interdisciplinary, interconnected and multimodal cultural representations), determines different manifestations of the communicative functions, which at times depart from the traditional Jakobsonian and linguistic manifestations. More specifically, the purpose of this research is to establish that meme-distinctive manifestations of communicative functions are especially prevalent with regard to functions associated with the addressee/the audience, with the channel of communication, and with self-reflexivity. Namely, that the conative, the phatic and the metalingual functions may exceed linguistic bounds and migrate onto the visual elements, or simply express themselves through mechanisms which are outside of the memetic content, as a result of the asynchronous participation enabled by social media platforms (Twitter in our case study). This means that the tools needed to realize these functions and the markers of the conative, the phatic and the metalingual functions change drastically, in order to accommodate and reflect the multimodality of memes. Therefore, this study endeavours to suggest that a change or an adaptation of terminology concerning certain communicative functions would be needed to reflect memetic realities. Throughout the stylistic analysis, this research aims to show that the communicative functions contribute to the creation of group identity. In other words, group identity is reflected in the ways in which users manipulate these communicative functions through language and visuals which propagate community values and opinions and, more importantly, express solidarity and a shared sense of belonging to a cause.

Literature Review

As with any scholarly approach within the highly dynamic field of Internet memes, it is necessary to define our terminology and to provide a stable theoretical framework, which will serve as the starting point of the ensuing analysis. Before embarking on our analysis, it is therefore essential to explore what a meme is, especially since we have posited that the very nature of memes influences the mechanisms employed in realising the communicative functions they exhibit. Limor Shifman defines memes as "groups of content units with common characteristics" (2014, 39). Although the definition is broad, it fits the object of analysis, as it presupposes that the creation and propagation of memes is achieved in multiple ways, and that a set of memes forms a unit (Shifman 2014, 40) whose constituents are not merely reiterations of each other, but variables within a continuum, exhibiting both commonalities and differences. Shifman rightly states that memes are "conceptual troublemakers" (2013, 362), but that the challenges they pose would be less daunting if viewed from a "communication-oriented perspective" (2013, 363). She establishes three mimetic layers (Shifman 2014, 39): content (represented by the particular ideas shared), form (how the message is perceived sensorially – through visuals, sounds, etc.) and stance – the attitude expressed through a certain meme (Shifman 2014, 40). Stance is of particular importance to the investigation proposed in this paper. This is because, in the examples under investigation, stance is the mimetic element that is the most politically charged; for the memes which will later be analysed, stance is the foundation of the meme's creative potential. As Limor Shifman (2014, 40-41) defines it, stance is realised on three levels: first, through "participant structures", theorised by Susan Philips as patterns of interaction between speakers in a communicative situation (1972, 370-394). These participant structures establish "who is entitled to participate and how" (Shifman 2014, 40). Secondly, stance (Shifman 2014, 40-41) is also a matter of keying (Goffman 1986, 40-82), meaning the "tone and style of communication" (Shifman 2014, 41). The third component of stance, according to Shifman (2014, 40-41), is realized through Roman

Jakobson's (1960) communicative functions – the referential, the emotive, the conative, the phatic, the metalingual and the poetic functions, which entail the purposes of communication in interaction. The primary focus of this analysis will be the realisation of stance at the level of Jakobson's functions of language, namely the way in which communicative functions give rise to a particular stance in Shifman's acceptation (2014, 40). The paper will tangentially touch on keying (Goffman 1986, 40-82) and on participant structures (Philips 1972, 370-394) when they are particularly relevant to the communicative functions which are performed. Furthermore, this research will follow Jane Lugea's rigorous model of stylistic analysis of memes (2020), in which she builds upon and augments Shifman's notion of stance (2014, 40). A similar stylistic analysis will be conducted, in which the linguistic elements will be more closely examined against the backdrop of the visual components. Jane Lugea uses stylistic analysis in order to explore how memes "break […] rules – in the 'right' ways – to serve communicative effects" (2020, 82), which is also one of the aims of this study. In her pragma-stylistic analysis of what makes image macros successful/viral in online interaction, Jane Lugea hints at the fact that the visual components of a meme may heighten the "visual force behind the *expressive* and the *conative* stance" (2020, 97, emphasis in the original). Lugea's analysis makes it clear that both visual and linguistic elements contribute to the emergence of the meme as a "text" (2020, 81), and to the adaptation of stylistic rules and communicative functions. This comprehensive view, in which both linguistic and visual elements become part of the interpreted text, will be valuable throughout this paper.

There is an additional aspect to be taken into consideration, as it impacts our research to a certain extent. The memes under scrutiny are platform-bound memes, which were originally posted as tweets. Of late, it has become common to "meme-ify" "bite-sized" social media posts. One must be mindful of the fact that such memes do not conform to the now traditional structure of image macros: they do not necessarily establish a "template" which users simply reuse. Instead, the imitated element is primarily that of form: an image of a cat accompanied by what the cat

thinks about a particular aspect related to Brexit (in our case). Stance or the deliberate position (Shifman 2014, 40) that a meme adopts towards Brexit can vary, according to the dominant communicative function. This selectiveness at the level of imitation gives users more freedom to manipulate the visual and textual elements in order to fit a certain stance, and to propagate their political ideas. This paper argues that, even if such memes are tied to a specific platform, they exhibit the same transmissibility and memetic potential as any other successful meme. Naomi Smith and Simon Copland (2021) introduced the term "*memetic moments* or emergent memes, which not only function as entertainment, but also facilitate discussion of important political issues" (2021, 25, my emphasis). According to them, "what distinguishes these memes from the template-based memes, which are the objects of previous research, is their reliance on text" (Smith and Copland 2021, 26). However, they assert that such Tweet-memes do not rely on an image, but on "readers' sophisticated knowledge of online communication", which allows them to interpret the memes (Smith and Copland 2021, 26). The present paper wishes to challenge this idea, by showing that text alone, although it plays a central part, does not have the same impact, and that, in the absence of the pictorial elements, the primary communicative function of certain memes would not be achieved. Although, terminology-wise, "memetic moments" (Smith and Copland 2021, 25) would be a more precise denomination of the phenomenon under investigation, this study favours the term "meme", since these Tweet-memes function differently only structurally, essentially exhibiting the same tendencies of re-creation or creative reduplication and transmission as any meme.

In order to achieve balance in the analysis of text and image, while preserving Shifman's "communication-oriented perspective" (2013, 363) and Jane Lugea's methodology of stylistic analysis (2020) applied to both text and image, this investigation will make use of some of the theoretical considerations of Jed R. Brubaker (2008). Brubaker is in favour of a semiotic interpretation of memes. In his analysis of LOLcat memes, which present similarities with the memes with which this study is concerned, Brubaker stated that the linguistic elements in these memes serve the function of "fram[ing] and augment[ing] the viewer's understanding of the visual

content" and of "provid[ing] narrative structure" (2008, 118). Thus, there is a semiotic rapport between text and image (Brubaker 2008, 119-120). According to Brubaker, the combination of text and image, in which the text frames the image and infuses it with meaning, makes LOLcat memes both "expository and dialogic" (2008, 121), because the text "makes a statement about the image", or an exposition (2008, 121), while also establishing a "dialogue" between audiences and the cats (2008, 121). In Brubaker's view, "The expository and dialogic textual styles seen in […] LOLcats attempt to frame visual content within a specific point of view and establish meaning that was otherwise not possible" (2008, 123). Despite the fact that LOLcat memes present an older meme model, the #CatsAgainstBrexit memes which will be the focus of this analysis function in a similar manner, as the interplay between text and visuals creates a relationship between an "anthropomorphize[d] cat" (Brubaker 2008, 119) and the viewer. The text and image mutually influence each other's meanings in a similar manner, as this paper also posits. Such a semiotic analysis is concerned with "the relationships between signs and codes, signifiers and signified to create meaning" (Huntington 2013, no page numbers). Given that this approach values a structuralist perspective, much like Roman Jakobson's functions of language (1960), such a *modus operandi* fits the scope of this research and enables us to show how memes function as signs and as a type of code shared by a community, and used in the expression of group identity and solidarity.

Case Study

The following analysis focuses on memes within the #CatsAgainstBrexit trend. This study is confined to Brexit memes in this movement due to their continuity in both form and content. Unlike other Brexit meme templates, tied to local or national cultural products, this movement is culturally accessible on a global scale because of its usage of cat images, and thus more easily propagated. Each meme is analysed with regard to one or two communicative functions, which are more straightforwardly illustrated by the chosen meme(s). This does not mean that the potential of a given meme

is limited only to those communicative functions the paper focuses on, but rather that a certain meme is more illustrative of the function in question.

The Referential, the Emotive and the Conative Functions. The Question of the Phatic Function

On the 18th of June 2016, the following Tweet was posted, which spawned the #CatsAgainstBrexit meme phenomenon, according to the *Know Your Meme* website (Literally Media, Ltd. 2016) (see Fig. 1). The post is no longer available on Twitter, to my knowledge.



Fig. 1. The First #CatsAgainstBrexit Post. "My cat is sad because #Brexit…". *Know Your Meme*, Literally Media, Ltd.

At the time, this was a meme in the making, presenting all of the characteristics necessary to ensure transmissibility and popular appeal, which would ensure its success and virality. This particular meme-to-be employs a regretful, but also a critical stance towards the possible outcomes of Brexit. As far as participant structures are concerned, this Tweet reminds a possible audience that a Remainer is entitled to express a political opinion online – and this participant structure will be replicated throughout all of the memes in favour of a "Remain vote". The meme displays a mournful tone, doubled by a veiled critical one. The critical attitude towards Brexit is nonetheless subdued by the light-hearted personification of the cat.

The realization of stance at the level of communicative functions ensures the Tweet's popular appeal. First, the referential function is particularly tricky in this memetic instance. According to Jakobson (1960, 354), the referential function entails the objective information carried by language, information by which language describes the context of reference. How this Tweet's context of reference should be understood is a matter of inquiry. If we take "My cat is sad" (Literally Media Ltd. 2016) (see Fig. 1) as descriptive of the reality depicted by the image, then this utterance fulfils the referential function. However, it is clear that the function of the utterance is the expressive one, by providing the feelings of the creator, disguised as those of the cat. The post's success is secured by an appeal to the audience's emotions, a call to empathy with the cat (in a creatively framed make-believe situation). If we accept the referential function of this utterance, this would make the Tweet about a sad cat and nothing more – but the image of the cat (here as well as in LOLcat memes), as Brubaker reminds us, is not semantically autonomous, because meaning arises only in conjunction with text that "reorients" our appraisal of the image (2008, 122). Therefore, text and image establish a code together (Brubaker 2008, 122). With this in mind, the image enforces the emotive value of the tweet, fulfilling the expressive function, by providing a visual representation of a despondent feline. Thus, the image itself does not refer to an objective context of communication, but rather, acts as a signifier of a particular attitude or emotion, more so than the simple linguistic construction "My cat is sad" (see Fig. 1). Text alone would not be as emotionally impactful as the picture. The image amplifies the meme's affective impact.

Nevertheless, an examination of how the meme accomplishes its referential function and how it correlates with the objective context of Brexit remains essential to our study. It is important to note that Brexit memes were relevant only in the context associated with Brexit. Therefore, the creator of this meme assumes that there is a shared understanding between her and the presupposed audience, of the political event which was referenced at the time of the post. In this respect, the referential function is downtoned in favour of the expressive and the conative ones, because the context of reference is accessible to all those who use the hashtag #Brexit (see Fig. 1).

Having established that there is a shared understanding between the creator and the audience regarding the context at hand, we need to look into how the meme appeals to the audience, and who that audience might be. As far as language is concerned, the conative function is achieved here through the means pointed to by Jakobson, namely, the imperative and the vocative (1960, 355) – "RT" [re-tweet] and "Come on guys" (see fig. 1), which are meant to persuade audiences to adopt a similar stance. In the highly globalized and interconnected online environment, it is imperative to ascertain the specific audience targeted by these memes. It is crucial to assess whether the post effectively targets a specific demographic, aligning the content with users' preferences. Additionally, it is pertinent to inquire whether the Tweet-meme exclusively targets individuals who identify as Remainers. According to Jessica Vitak, a specific curation of content by creators would not be viable due to "context collapse", which she defines as "the flattening out of multiple distinct audiences in one's social network" (2012, 451). This makes such posts very similar to a message in a bottle, as "diverse groups of individuals who would otherwise be unlikely to communicate" (Vitak 2012, 451) come together as accidental recipients of the same message. One would think that not knowing one's audience would have a negative impact on the effective propagation of the post. However, this indefiniteness of the audience has a positive impact on the "meme-ification" potential of this tweet and on enlarging the post's reach across diverse ideologies. The tweet is open to debate, and we see this in the subsequent formation of the opposing movement, #CatsForBrexit, supported by politician Daniel Hannan (see Fig. 4). Thus, the indeterminateness of the audience proves to be even more advantageous, because it allows the post to develop into a dialogue, which will be conducted on the same imitated model. Thus, the post is not a meme in itself, but will become a variable in a meme-continuum as users add and share their own recreations of the post. This constant re-mixing ensures the formation of a community which uses the same code (memes). In the subsequent formation of the two opposing factions of meme creators, we see that the indefiniteness of audience leads to the act of forging an "imagined community" (Anderson 2006, 24), socially disparate, but united by the cultural productions they put out and by common goals. In other words, if one replicates the

original tweet, it is precisely because of the complicity and the shared understanding presupposed by the tweet, which exhorted people to take action through the conative function. Moreover, the impact on audiences is enforced on an emotive level, which also aids in persuasion. Thus, user interaction is maintained.

Interaction is here maintained through persuasion, which falls under the conative function, yet traditionally, maintaining communication and "attracting attention" are achieved through the phatic function (Jakobson 1960, 355). The phatic function is concerned with showing solidarity and, in online multimedia communication, this function translates outside of the linguistic sphere. Interaction is prolonged through re-tweeting (as the creator urges the audience to do), liking and commenting. Thus, we may posit that, in this tweet-meme (see Fig. 1), there is a blend between the conative and the phatic function, because users are directed towards maintaining communication. In the case of this meme, we may speak about the Conative-Phatic function, but this coupling of the two functions is not always present in online interactions. Indeed, other memes taken up for analysis in this study (see below) do not verbalise any sort of exhortations regarding audience participation. Thinking outside the realm of purely verbal interactions, we may find that the phatic function may disappear (in linguistic form) and take on other guises and a wholly different significance. Since the channel of communication is virtual, words no longer need to fulfil the phatic function – the affordances of the platform have already taken care of it. Asynchronous communication through sharing, liking and commenting no longer makes it necessary to verify whether the channel of communication functions efficiently. Such acts as sharing, as Blommaert points out (2015, 22), serve in the creation of group identity, in the emergence of an awareness of group membership and interpersonal relationships. In other words, if someone shares or recreates the sad cat tweet (see Fig. 1), if they use the same hashtag, they indirectly express their solidarity. Thus, Internet culture shows us that (participatory) actions, even if expressed through a simple like or share, matter more than words in the formation of a community, and provide an extra relational layer to our linguistic communication.

Pseudo-Referentiality: Pun-Based Memes and the Poetic Function

Perhaps the most important aspect pertaining to memes of any kind is the creative way in which they frame a particular message, through the juxtaposition of image and text. They manipulate text and image in an imaginative manner, and thus there is a "focus on the message for its own sake" through the performance of the poetic function (Jakobson 1960, 356). As far as verbal communication is concerned, the poetic function is achieved when the creator concentrates on the aesthetic dimension of the message (idem). Although memes are more often than not considered forms of popular rather than elevated art, this does not mean that they cannot convey a message in an artistic manner, by employing particular techniques which combine visual imagination and a clever, unexpected use of language. This shows that there was an artistic intent behind the meme. Below are two examples from the #CatsAgainstBrexit movement (see Fig. 2 and Fig. 3):



Fig. 3. A Double-Entendre Meme. @hagureyume. "He wants in #CatsAgainstBrexit". *Twitter (X).*



Fig. 2. A Memetic Play on Words. Scarlet Wilde (@wilde). "Fendi is a Norwegian Immigrant. Lives in a sink estate. #CatsAgainstBrexit". *Twitter (X)*.

The meme above (Fig. 2) relies on wordplay in order to realise the poetic function. It recognises the potentiality of linguistic and visual signs to create new meanings, which depart from the basic denotative meanings. Similar mechanisms are used by the meme below (see Fig. 3):

Both memes anthropomorphize the cats to a greater extent than the original tweet, and it is clear that personification plays a role in achieving the poetic function. There is no longer any possible reference to the creator – "My cat" (Literally Media, Ltd.) (see Fig. 1) or to an audience, but the cats are presented as fully-fleshed individuals who share human experiences. Thus, these memes employ a critical stance, but this is achieved not through the emotive function (as in Fig. 1), but through the poetic function, which adds a layer of irony (particularly in Fig. 2). Additionally, there is no call to any presupposed audience in any of these memes, so the conative function is not expressed linguistically or pictorially.

Figures 2 and 3 show a creative use of the memetic components through wordplay. The first meme in this section presents the protagonist, a Norwegian Forest cat, as a "Norwegian immigrant", according to Scarlet Wilde (see Fig. 2), employing personification as the main trope, as do all the other memes belonging to this movement. This allows for a humorous keying (Goffman 1986, 40-82) of the meme, while also preserving a critical attitude, along with a touch of irony directed towards Brexiters who support anti-immigration policies. This again shows that at the level of participant structures, a Remainer is entitled to critique the Brexit ideology, characterised by heightened nationalistic sentiments and scepticism towards immigrants (or even downright xenophobia). By personifying a Norwegian Forest cat into a "Norwegian immigrant" (see Fig. 2), Wilde's meme gives a metaphorical voice to immigrants who would be affected by a pro-Brexit result. Thus, the meme also emphasizes an underlying participant structure (which attests that disadvantaged immigrants are

entitled to share their views on Brexit, so the meme expresses the identity and experiences of a marginalized group). However, the seriousness of the topic of immigration is lightened by the use of irony, which is achieved through puns, realizing the poetic function.

The semiotic approach is particularly useful in understanding the meme depicted in Figure 2. A semiotic analysis shows how the text “reorients” (Brubaker 2008, 122) our understanding of the image. It is also important to be mindful of how the image itself changes our understanding of the text, allowing for irony to emerge. The meme’s “punch line” resides in its ambivalent use of the term “sink estate” (Wilde 2016) (see Fig. 2), which becomes a pun. Had we only had access to the text, we would have simply concluded that the cat lives in an underprivileged housing area. Had there been a referential relationship between the image and the text, the tweet could have been keyed as serious or even tragic. The comic-ironic keying emerges from the dissonance between what the text conveys and what the image shows (a disadvantaged community/housing area, as the text would lead one to believe, vs. “sink estate” taken literally, as “an estate that is a sink”, such as the image shows). Therefore, in this meme, “sink estate” (see Fig. 2) becomes polysemous, and both of its meanings (the idiomatic and the literal) are exploited. This is the standard recipe for a pun. The meme alludes to a dire socio-political situation, but the image lightens the mood, because it blurs the boundaries between literal and figurative language. Therefore, the pun plays a big part in how this meme conveys a message that transcends literal interpretation. On account of the poetic function it exhibits through the use of puns and personification, the meme can thus be taken both as a joke and as an instance of political activism, showing solidarity for a cause or for a particular group in a creative way.

When it comes to making Twitter-based memes, one must use concise language in order to get a point across, because Twitter limits the character count per post. Therefore, meme creators must clearly express their stance, while also being mindful of platform limitations. To achieve this balance, Brexit memes may exhibit a clever use of allusion, a figure of speech which contributes to performing the poetic function. They subtly

allude to the political event in relation to which they wish to situate themselves, by using text to direct the interpretation of the image towards the political event (Brexit). The second meme under discussion in this section (@hagureyume) (see Fig. 3) alludes to the prevalent discourse in the days leading up to Brexit: which of "in" or "out" (of the EU) is the better choice. Allusion here orientates the interpretation of the image (see Fig. 3), while also establishing an anti-Brexit stance in a humorous manner. This image, along with a text similar to "He wants in" (see Fig. 3) helps propagate ideology and political beliefs in a subtle manner. This particular meme has been chosen to exemplify this phenomenon and the realisation of the poetic function through allusion, because it is linguistically concise, thus efficient in spreading a political belief. Both the image and the text allude to Brexit, with only the hashtag making a clear reference to it. Personification (through envisioning the cat as a human-like creature, capable of decision-making and of enacting conscious volition) and the subtle allusion uphold a humorous, light-hearted mood, even if the debate itself is quite serious. The cats symbolically represent their owners. The attribution of one's political beliefs to a personified cat ensures that the message is taken with no ill-intent, and that others can contribute to the debate in a calm but engaged manner, expressing allegiance to a political group (Remainers or Leavers) without resorting to subversive political schemes or personal attacks.

The Metalingual/Self-Reflexive Function

The metalingual function has a straightforward explanation with regard to language: it is realised when language, as the code of communication, reflects upon itself, emphasizing and explaining its own mechanisms (Jakobson 1960, 356). When we explore this function in relation to memes, things become more complicated. Even when we think of the term "metalingual" or "metalinguistic", we are inclined to define it as the self-reflexivity of language (with a strong emphasis on language, as the code of communication that we use most often). Memes do use language; and sometimes, they can clarify the mechanisms of language in a meta-linguistic

way. As Jane Lugea pointed out in her analysis of image macros belonging to the *Philosoraptor* family, "Philosoraptor's musings can be of the linguistic variety, and thus may also perform a metalingual function" (2020, 93). However, there is, arguably, a fundamental flaw in considering that only memes which reflect upon language perform this "meta" function. Before exposing this flaw, we have to go back to the source. Jakobson defined the metalingual function as tied to the code of communication (1960, 356). To see how this should be adapted when it comes to memes, an analogy with the poetic function might be useful. At the start of his exposition on the poetic function, Jakobson admits that "many devices studied by poetics are not confined to verbal art", citing "motion pictures", "frescoes and miniatures", "music, ballet" and "graphic art" as other possible media wherein the poetic function might be performed (1960, 350). He admits that there are commonalities between language and other "systems of signs" (Jakobson 1960, 351). In this respect, this study has shown that memes are capable of realising the poetic function along with the other functions, confirming once again Jakobson's indication that this function can extend to different media (1960, 350). However, the same function is realised in different manners across various media. Thus, if the poetic function is realised by memes "on their own terms", we should also look at the "metalingual" function in the context of memes themselves, which incorporate both visuals and text. This is achieved not purely in the context of language, since memes are not just pieces of linguistic information. A terminology that is not adapted to mimetic mechanisms may lead us to falsely assume that the metalingual function must only be confined to language. On the contrary, this function is associated with the code (Jakobson 1960, 356). Of course, in the case of verbal communication, the code is language. In the case of memes, the semiotic approach helps clear up the confusion. By virtue of the "semiotic relationship between the text and the visual" (Brubaker 2008, 120) and of the fact that both text and image contribute to decoding meaning (Huntington 2013, no page numbers), we should consider that all of the elements which make up the meme are used collectively as a code. Thus, the more appropriate denomination

for the function related to the code, in the case of memes, is the meta-memetic function. Metamemes, self-referential memes also known as "memes about memes" engaging in the "creative repurposing of memes" (Anderson and Sheeler 2014, 229) are a prime example of the meta-memetic or self-reflexive function, because they unveil the processes by which a meme is created, by referencing another meme format. It has been posited that "When political figures transmit or remix a meme in ways that are favourable to their personal brand, they create what we call a *meta-meme*" (Anderson and Sheeler, 2014, 229). This is precisely the case with the meme introduced below (see Fig. 4).

Within the meme movement under discussion, there is one meta-memetic moment. In a tweet posted by Daniel Hannan, a Conservative politician who at the time of Brexit was a member of the European Parliament for South East England, the "Remainer" ideology was subtly criticised (see Fig. 4).



Fig. 4. A parodic meta-meme. Daniel Hannan (@DanielJHannan). "I asked @RealGrumpy-Cat…". *Twitter (X).*

This meme (see Fig. 4) is keyed as mock-ironic, exhibiting the politician's adversarial stance towards the meme movement #CatsAgainstBrexit. As far as participant structures are concerned, the meme reminds audiences that a Leaver is entitled to express an adversarial opinion towards the

opposing "tribe". This stance is achieved primarily through the self-reflexive communicative function. The meme refers to a popular Internet meme, the Grumpy Cat meme, featuring her signature attitude of indifference and irony, by referring to the well-known mock-ironic stance – "She wasn't impressed" (Quick Meme LLC) (see Fig. 5).

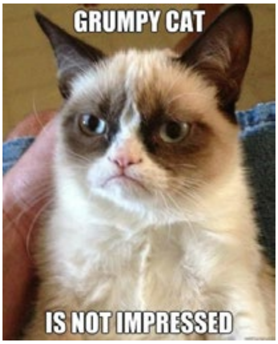


Fig. 5. A famous example of the Grumpy Cat meme. Quick Meme LLC, "Grumpy Cat is not impressed". *Quick Meme.*

Daniel Hannan's meme adapts and cross-references the Grumpy cat template (see Fig. 5), while adopting a satirical stance and showing the mechanisms behind expressing this mock-ironic stance, and behind creating one's own Grumpy Cat meme – putting together a grumpy cat and the Grumpy Cat specific caption. Thus, this meme reflects on the means through which another meme functions, while also responding to the memes belonging to the #CatsAgainstBrexit movement. The meme also succeeds in cementing the position of the ideologically opposing group, in favour of Brexit, with which the politician expresses solidarity. Thus, even when memes reflect on themselves, on other memes, or on memetic mechanisms in general, they employ this self-awareness to indirectly communicate with other Brexit memes or Grumpy Cat memes, to continue a debate, or to indirectly invite a whole group to express their attitude. Since Hannan's meme references a popular meme template, the self-reflexive function serves to show that memes are inevitably tied to one another, and that there is a constant dialogue between memes, which is also reflected at the level of political dialogue. Moreover, given that both the stance and the form of the Grumpy Cat meme are imitated, the form being deconstructed, we can assert that the meta-memetic function adds a parodic element,

through which both the Grumpy Cat meme and the #CatsAgainstBrexit memes are commented upon. This meme by Daniel Hannan adapts both the prior format of the Grumpy Cat meme, and the then emerging format of the #CatsAgainstBrexit memes. Thus, there is a strong suggestion that memes, being variables of one another and exhibiting a strong interconnectedness, inevitably reflect on one another, and provide a transparency of their working mechanisms by the very choice of what to imitate and what to adapt. The very first meme-tweet itself (see Fig. 1), is reflected on by all the tweets that adapt it. These subsequent creations all become meta-memes of the original to some degree.

Conclusions and Further Research Paths

In conclusion, the present study has shown that memes succeed in the formation and maintenance of group identity by exploiting one or more of Roman Jakobson's communicative functions (1960), which are achieved in an integrative manner, through meme-specific mechanisms, incorporating text and visuals. The fulfilment of these communicative functions ensures a social effect so that the memes and their creators are in constant dialogue. Through the communicative functions employed – from the referential to the self-reflexive – memes creatively ensure that group ideologies are stated in an efficient, concise and light-hearted manner, providing an alternative to heated political debates and fostering the continuation of interaction within a group and between adversarial groups. Thus, one of the most important characteristics of memes as performers of the Jakobsonian communicative functions is their relational nature, which contributes to the expression of group membership and solidarity with a cause. Granted, this research prioritised quality over quantity in order to provide a more in-depth analysis of representative memes. Thus, it would be interesting to further explore the matter of communicative functions within the #CatsAgainstBrexit movement from a quantitative perspective, in order

to statistically determine whether some functions are more successfully achieved than others across the entire movement.

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Language Transfer Seen through Reborrowings: A Case Study of Anglo-Japanese Fandom Terminology

OPRA ZSOLT

Abstract. In the 50s, Japanese animation, still very much in its formative years, left the shores of Japan for the first time, starting the slow but steady influx of popular entertainment media from Japan into the West. By the 2000s, *anime* and *manga* had become a global phenomenon, and like every other form of art, they came with their own set of terminology. The present paper sets out to examine these terms from an intercultural and crosslinguistic perspective, discussing the jargon of the industry as well as the slang of the subculture centred around consuming these media, with particular attention paid to the semantics, etymology, as well as the phonological and morphosyntactic features of the borrowings and reborrowings entailed.

Keywords: *subculture, fandom, anime, manga, transcription, loanwords, reborrowings*

Introduction

As already pointed out in 1950 by American sociolinguist Einar Haugen, it is absurd to use the term 'borrowing' for the linguistic phenomenon of acquiring new lexemes from foreign languages—a practice just as common in our days as in his—as it takes place not only without the lender's consent and awareness, but the borrower is under no obligation to repay the loan, since they are not deprived of anything that should be recovered (Haugen 1950, 211). Still, there is a reason why we want to differentiate this from other methods of broadening a vocabulary born of intercultural communication, for there are aplenty, and none are literal borrowings. Let us think of the *river horse*, more widely known in English in its borrowed form, the *hippopotamus*, the name of which is a Greek coinage for an African species (Harper 2004). Unfamiliarity with foreign flora and fauna is a key reason for borrowings, and this is exactly what happened in English when it adopted the Latinised version of the name. Yet in the case of the Greek original, an invention prevailed instead, drawing on an analogy with something people would be more familiar with—a horse—rather than borrowing a name from any of the languages native to the area where the animals are from (Kostuch 2017, 76). At one end, thus, we see a learned borrowing, and at the other, a compound that is not borrowed at all. Between these two extremes, one can separate many types of borderline phenomena. Haugen differentiated loanwords, loanblends, and loanshifts, based on how much importation or substitution occurs during the borrowing process (1950, 214–215). If the term or phrase is imported without any of its components substituted, as 'hippopotamus' entered English via Latin, it is considered a loanword. Were any parts of it retained but others translated, something akin to 'riverine hippos', for instance, it would be a loanblend. The literal translation 'river horse' has no imported morphological elements; both *hippos* and *potamos* are substituted by their English equivalents to create a new compound expressing the same idea as the original *hippopotamus*, and so by Haugen's definition it would be considered a loanshift. The third category includes both semantic loans,

where only a certain layer of meaning is borrowed and attached to the corresponding word in the recipient language, and loan translations, where the meaning is re-constructed in a way that mirrors the pattern from the donor language (214). The term *calque* is mentioned by Haugen only in passing here, as the French name for loan translations, but since then its usage has become much more widespread. We shall use it here to mean any kind of borrowing that keeps the structure of the foreign term but translates its elements verbatim.

When it comes to loanwords, one could be tempted to deem them 'true borrowings', because they keep both the structure and the contents, yet we must not forget that they can also function as substitutes, just not on the morphosyntactic level. The word *hippopotamus* in English does not sound like its Latin counterpart, nor does it sound like the Ancient Greek original or its modern descendant. Haugen called this phenomenon 'phonemic substitution' (214), and given how no two languages share an exact phonetic inventory, this is expected to happen, to varying degrees, every time a concept / term is borrowed. Japanese and English are no exceptions to this, something we shall come back to when discussing transcription. As far as the appropriateness of the term 'borrowing' is concerned, Haugen concluded that, however faulty, it had to stay, for it had already become well-established and nothing more apt had been proposed and accepted to replace it (211–212). This has been valid to this day and predicted to remain so by British etymologist Philip Durkin (2020, 168). We too shall continue using it, along with the narrower term 'loanword' when appropriate. The focus of the present paper is, after all, on reborrowings, which come with their own set of terminological difficulties that must be addressed before examining the eponymous cases of English and Japanese language transfer in subcultural discourse and fandom terminology.

It should come as no surprise that 'reborrowing' does not have as consistent a history in academic discourse as 'borrowing' does. Haugen, for instance, mentions reborrowings only when referring to different forms of the same loanword used independently of one another. Such is the case of *krækkis* and *krækərs*, used respectively by older and younger American

Norwegians, both forms referring to 'crackers' (222). While this particular case is not widely discussed and could not be confirmed from an independent source, according to Haugen it appears to be a reborrowing only in the literal sense: the English word had been borrowed two times, resulting in two slightly different forms coexisting in the same environment within a community but favoured by a different set of speakers. Other sources also use 'reborrowing' for the repeated borrowing of words or cognates, but on a longer timescale, either from different phases of development of the same language or from closely related languages that evolved from one another. Old English, for instance, had borrowed the Latin word for 'giant' as *gīgant*, then reborrowed it from Old French as *geant*, after the first form fell out of use (Algeo 2010, 250). In both cases the donor and recipient languages kept their roles throughout the borrowing process—the original word or its derivatives never return to their source language; the *re*borrowing merely consists of them twice borrowed. In the following pages, we shall discuss a different kind of 'reborrowing', where the relative positions of the languages are not maintained.

A more suitable example for our purposes is the story of the word 'coach', deriving from Hungarian *kocsi*—originally a demonym of the village where the vehicle was first made—which upon entering English through German and French had gained several new meanings, including that of 'instructor' or 'tutor' from Oxford University slang[1]. The term was recently reborrowed in Hungarian, keeping the English spelling and pronunciation. In the process, both English and Hungarian were donors *and* recipients, switching roles in time. It is the sort of crosslinguistic interaction that we refer to in this paper when talking about 'reborrowing', but with the key players being English and Japanese, within the field of popular culture and fandom terminology. Before delving into that, however, there is one last stop that we must make.

One big advantage of borrowing between languages that share a writing system is that even if the words change in shape, pronunciation, or meaning, some clues such as diacritics and specific letter combinations

1. Private tutors were seen as 'coaches' carrying students through difficult exams. This sense was later broadened to include trainers in competitive sports as well (Harper, "coach").

remain to reveal their borrowed status (to linguists, at least). This becomes difficult when graphemic boundaries are crossed, since, unlike the previous examples, borrowing between English and Japanese involves completely dissimilar forms of writing. Transcription is the obvious key to solving this problem, but even that can be notoriously difficult with languages that operate with an inconsistent spelling system, retaining arbitrarily many of the abovementioned clues, and often relying on localised re-spellings. As regards Japanese, many conflicting systems of transliteration and transcription are used in parallel, further detrimental to our present objective. To counter this, our paper will rely on the modified Hepburn system of romanisation for Japanese, regardless of the alternatives used originally. We shall mention other renderings only if they are ingrained in English, such as the heavily anglicised forms 'soy' and 'rickshaw'. Since vowel length is not phonemic in English, it is not uncommon to omit the macrons denoting long vowels customary in the Hepburn-system. If this is the single difference between the conventionally used and the properly transcribed forms, as in *sudoku* and *sūdoku*, respectively, missing macrons will be added for consistency.

Some preliminary notices should be made about the Japanese customs as well. The language concurrently uses four writing systems—three deriving from Chinese characters used either logographically or syllabically, and an alphabetised system based on the Latin-script known as *rōmaji* (ローマ字 'Roman characters'). It is worth noting that the latter can follow not only the Hepburn-style but also any other form of romanisation, depending majorly on personal preference[2].

As far as the traditional systems are concerned, *kanji* (漢字 'Han Chinese characters') are the oldest, used mainly for nouns, verbal and adjectival roots, while conjugation, auxiliaries, and particles are written with *hiragana* (ひらがな), a syllabary developed from the phonetic use of *kanji* written

2. The Japanese government prescribes the so-called *kunren-shiki* (訓令式 'cabinet-ordered style') romanisation which reflects the inner logic of the phonetic inventory of the language more closely than the Hepburn-system does, but for the price of some misleading spelling choices that cause difficulties for language learners, such as rendering し as *si* instead of *shi*, or つ as *tu* instead of *tsu*.

in cursive, and as such used also when the appropriate *kanji* is unknown or unimportant. Borrowings today are conventionally spelt in the other Chinese-derived syllabary, *katakana* (カタカナ), but this system is also used to mark several other things such as onomatopoeia, slang, or scientific nomenclature, so it is not an immediate signal for foreign origin. In fact, anthropological linguist Adachi Nobuko (足立 伸子) argues that *katakana* is no longer primarily signalling loanwords, ingrained as they now are in everyday speech, but merely denotes markedness, mainly representing colloquialisms (Stanlaw 2004, 182). This view is not new; linguist Timothy J. Vance had already drawn attention to the emphatic use of katakana in his work on Japanese phonetics in 1986 (4), and according to native studies it had been used in *manga* as early as in the 1900s (Robertson 2021, 60–61). To complicate matters, both *kanji* and *hiragana* were once used, rather inconsistently, for borrowings as well, and so many older loans have forms attested in those scripts too—Chinese borrowings overwhelmingly so, but also many early European ones (Vance, 3; Robertson, 182). This custom is generally reserved today for wordplays only. As far as standard usage is concerned, *katakana* is the most commonly used way to spell contemporary loans, English included, unless they are left in their original (*rōmaji*) form.

The fact that there exists a separate system reserved, if not exclusively, for borrowings, does not mean that the phonetic syllabaries are better suited for transcribing loanwords. Japanese is a *mora*-timed language that does not generally tolerate consonant clusters. To abide by this constraint, helper vowels are inserted between the consonants of loanwords with challenging clusters, yielding many long, strange forms that we must decipher and explain throughout this paper. There are certain customs regarding where and what is to be added, but no such standard as a reverse-Hepburn exists to unequivocally prescribe these, and so we shall find many alternative ways of 'Japanising' the same word, this fact presenting further challenges along the way.

Lastly, we must note that Japanese uses the so-called Eastern name order—family name followed by the personal one—and this paper shall respect that when giving full names, with only first letters being capitalised.

Short mentions will feature the surname only, as it is customary in Western practice too. The terms 'east' and 'west', while just as problematic as 'borrowing', are being relied on to avoid repeated, lengthy explanations when referencing their generally understood cultural spheres based around Europe and China respectively.

All translations are the author's unless otherwise specified.

A Quick Overview. The Case of English

Renowned linguist David Crystal famously described the English language as an 'insatiable borrower' (1994, 126). The way he defines borrowing is rather simple: one language taking lexemes from another. English, indeed, has perfected it, acquiring loanwords from more than 120 different languages, Crystal claims in the same source, the number steadily growing to 'well over 300', in the latest edition (2019, 136). While this certainly is no news for linguists, non-experts tend to associate the donor role with English rather than that of the recipient—especially if they come from a non-anglophone environment where they find themselves surrounded by English slogans, advertising, technical jargon, or entertainment media. After all, English appears to be the closest we have come to a world language, or a global *lingua franca*, if we want to put it more ironically, as neither French, to which the phrase etymologically refers, nor Latin, in which it was formulated, had ever managed to attain such widespread usage across the globe as English has done. But the donor and recipient roles are not mutually exclusive, and for all the words and concepts that English has delivered to countless other nations by land, sail, or air, just as many have come to English from somewhere else, mainly via French and Latin—just to accentuate the abovementioned irony—and from Japanese as well. We shall turn to explore these borrowings now, starting from common ones to those specifically taken from popular culture, media franchises, and fandom communities.

A comparatively large number of Japanese loanwords are widely known and immediately associated with their country of origin—consider *sushi*, *origami*, or *samurai*—although many are, in fact, borrowings themselves, or constructed from borrowed roots, such as *tōfu*, *bonsai* or *rikisha* ('rickshaw'). Most of these are from Chinese, but many can, in turn, be traced to even older sources, such as *zen*, which ultimately comes from Sanskrit (Dumoulin 1994, xvii). The role Chinese plays here is not so different from the cases we shall discuss later in this paper, where English acts as a bridge connecting Japanese with Latin or Greek— languages which otherwise would have had a hard time coming into contact—through words such as 'drama' (*dorama* ドラマ)[3].

The matter can also be complicated by the fact that not all Japanese words of Chinese origin that entered English had done so from the standard dialect. The previously mentioned 'soy', which appears to be a perfectly ordinary English noun like 'boy', 'joy' or 'toy', comes from Dutch, which picked it up from the Kagoshima dialectal form /soj/ instead of the standard /ɕoːju/ (*shōyu* 醤油 'soy sauce'). The word, unsurprisingly, is itself a borrowing from Chinese 醬油 , with dozens of variant pronunciations old and new (JLect, "soi・shoi"; Harper, "soy"). We could delve into such discussions of provenience and variation with every word touched on, but the routes taken by them before ending up in their present state can rarely, if ever, be traced back with perfect accuracy—and many times need not either. What matters to us is not that the word *ninja* is originally made up of Chinese elements[4] but that it was made and popularised in Japan (hence, *Sino*-Japanese) and reached the West from there, referring to a specifically Japanese phenomenon. Similarly, many words that are of non-Japanese

3. The word, in everyday Japanese usage, exclusively denotes a television drama, regardless of its origin, without being extended to theatrical plays or to a slang sense, such as intrigue or melodrama. Reborrowed into English, it narrows even further, standing specifically for Japanese TV-dramas (see Clements and Tamamuro 2003, Denison 2015).

4. The native term *shinobi* (忍び 'concealing, sneaking') used for both the act and the agent performing the act of concealment can be extended into the less ambiguous noun phrase *shinobi no mono* (忍びの者 'sneaking person'), which can then be shortened to 忍者, read now as *ninja* using the borrowed Chinese readings of its constituents, as customary with *kanji*-compounds. The latter, the Sino-Japanese version, got popularised in the West, but both are common in Japan.

origin are treated as such, not necessarily out of ignorance but because they denote a uniquely Japanese variant of something Westerners are already familiar with, like *shōgi* (often called Japanese chess) or *mikan* (also known as Satsuma orange), both using borrowed Chinese readings. Being pedantic about etymology in cases like these is rather futile.

The closer we get to *niche* domains, the less clear the borrowings become to people at first glance. At the end of August 2023, scrolling through the BBC News one would have found a headline asking, "Netflix's One Piece: Is Hollywood finally doing anime right?" (2023), and they probably would have stopped only for a moment to ponder on the word *anime* before moving on to read about the Johannesburg fire that occurred on the same day. Those browsing the *Hollywood Reporter* instead were told, "'One Piece' Review: Netflix's Live-Action Manga Adaptation Is a Delight" (Han 2023). The phrase 'live-action manga adaptation', and *manga* in particular, likely caused significantly more head-scratches than *anime* did, although it is still a relatively well-known term that many people would recognise. If we leave behind the mainstream media, however, and wander onto a site like CBR (formerly known as *Comic Book Resources*), we can easily be greeted with a listicle entitled, "10 Worst Ways An Anime Character Was Isekai'd" (Trinos 2023) which might be puzzling even for people inside the *anime* fandom. One can be familiar with the term *isekai*, and yet still wonder when the apostrophe standing for dropped e's from Shakespeare's time has crept back into the language, and in such a strange environment at that. It actually did not, but the phenomenon happening here is certainly no less intriguing.

Let us start by satisfying all potential curiosities: *isekai*—without *d*—is a genre label applied attributively to stories where a generally teenage protagonist is transported into a different world. This realm is the literal *i-sekai* (異世界 'different world'), as the Japanese original refers to the setting rather than the process of displacement, for which the English participle form 'isekai'd' was subsequently coined. While the trope itself has a centuries-long history both in Japan and worldwide—take the tale of Urashima Tarō or *Alice in Wonderland* as examples—this specific term

had not become widespread until a trend in so-called 'light novels' producing a seemingly endless supply of stories featuring it started in the 2010s (Pagan 2019; Morrissy 2021). What makes these novels 'light' is that they provide light entertainment in the form of short paperback fiction, often illustrated, serialised, long-running and mass-produced, yet also easily consumable and coming in an array of genres. As a format, the term 'light novel' is generally not considered derogatory, but those with *isekai* elements are very much so. Such narratives are often seen as merely satisfying the escapist fantasies of bored or disillusioned people, with the combined appeal of videogame-like adventures and an alarming amount of fanservice—suggestive content added to please the audience without bearing any plot relevance. We do not pass judgement, but merely note that both 'light novel' and 'fanservice' are borrowings from Japanese, just like *isekai*, despite their apparent English origins[5]. We shall not consider them as reborrowings, however, as they were coined by the Japanese, in Japan, from preexisting English words, similarly to how new compounds were formed using Chinese readings of *kanji* that eventually found their way back into Chinese (e.g. *ninja*). Such words are called *wasei-eigo* (和製英語 'Japanese-made English') and *wasei-kango* (和製漢語 'Japanese-made Chinese'), respectively, which we shall deal with later.

As far as the term *isekai* is concerned, while the word became immensely popular in the 2010s within the foreign fandom communities too, it is still relatively unknown outside the *anime-manga* subculture. It appeared rather late and only in headlines of the *Japan Times* (Margolis 2020, Ōsaki 2023), compared to the words *anime* and *manga* from the Western news portals, which brought concepts like *isekai* to the West in the first place. The latter two have been major sources of Japanese loanwords ever since they became popular in the United States in the '90s, providing us not just with formats or genre labels but names for demographic categories, character

5. The word 'light novel' (*raito noberu* ライトノベル or LN for short) was coined in the 90s by Kamikita Keita (神北恵太) in lieu of a better term for the new type of fiction (2020; see also Morrissy 2016). As for 'fanservice', while its exact origin cannot be traced back as accurately, it likely emerged in the 80s and was in common use by the 90s (AstroNerdBoy 2003; Galbraith 2013, 69), along with specific forms of 'service' (*sābisu* サービス) such as 'service cut', 'service shot', or 'service scene' (*Japanese with Anime* 2016b).

tropes, specific themes, recurring story-elements, as well as an abundance of catchphrases and other linguistic quirks. They are also, incidentally, a narrower category within something already familiar, just like our earlier *shōgi* example above being treated as a kind of chess. By the Japanese, *manga* (漫画) is understood as any kind of pictorial storytelling, while in the West its sense is restricted to Japanese comics—or, more loosely defined, one that is drawn in a style similar to the latter, including Chinese *manhua* and Korean *manhwa*. These three are cognates, local readings of the same *kanji*-compound which itself is often translated verbatim as 'whimsical pictures', as it was originally a name for hand-drawn, sequential comedic art. For that reason, translator and critic Frederik L. Schodt is right to claim that *manga* is just as much a misnomer as the English word 'comic' (1996, 34), for comedy is but one form such stories can take today alongside more serious, tragic, brutal, philosophical or even sexual styles.

Closely linked to *manga*, the other, probably even more prominent source for Japanese loans is *anime* (アニメ), which has a similar array of problems when it comes to its history and usage, but with an extra intercultural twist to it. In Japan, it denotes any kind of animated media, from Disney cartoons to animated advertisements, and based on whom we ask it can easily extend to cut-out and stop-motion animation too, or even puppetry. We have a much easier time when looking at it internationally, where it tends to refer to Japanese animation in particular, and even more narrowly to TV shows that are generally adapted from *manga*. In this sense, the situation mirrors that of *manga* perfectly. There is a catch here, however, immediately obvious if we pay a moment's attention to the words, for the term *anime* is, in itself, not Japanese; it comes from the English 'animation' (and, indirectly, Latin), which, as established above, means exactly what *anime* means to the Japanese. The semantic narrowing occurs only when the term is reborrowed into English—or other languages, for as soon as it leaves Japan it carries its mark from then on. But let us not get ahead of ourselves. As discussed quite thoroughly by Denison (2015a) in her critical introduction to *anime*, there is a wide literature on the problematics of the word itself, as it was not always used as such even in Japan, and throughout

its intricate history it has competed with many other terms, both native and borrowed, before settling in its current position to be retroactively applied even to things that were not deemed *anime* before.

What interests us here is that the short form *anime* was famously used by *manga*-artist and director Tezuka Osamu (手塚 治虫) when referring to his 1963 series *Astro Boy* (*Tetsuwan atomu* 鉄腕アトム), explicitly differentiating it from *animation*, and also spelling it out for emphasis: "What we [Mushi Production, the studio founded by Tezuka] are making is not animation. It is TV anime, alright? A-ni-me".[6] (Takahashi and Tsugata 2011, 48). As far as the word itself is concerned, it is not some fanciful rendering to make it sound more fashionable, nor an early attempt at brandification, but simply a morphological clipping of the original borrowing, which is transcribed as *animēshon*. Loanwords entering Japanese habitually go through such processes of abbreviation, and we shall see other, often more extreme examples of that later. Therefore, while not special in this respect, the act of superseding *animēshon* by *anime* was, nonetheless, a differentiation, and *Astro Boy* did indeed end up being a cornerstone in many ways—if for no other reason than because enough critics considered it so (Denison 2015a, 78; Clements 2013, 4). The biggest impact insofar as intercultural communication is concerned, however, lies in the fact that *Astro Boy* had also crossed the ocean, becoming the first *anime* series to air on television in the United States (Denison, 6; Clements and McCarthy 2015, 47), beginning a trend that has lasted to this day. That is not to say that people immediately started calling it an *anime*. In fact, not even in Japan did fans pick up on the word just because of Tezuka's statement, as the subculture was still very much in its infancy. Other creators were also pushing their own labels in their fanbases, while the general audience was seeking connections to things they were already familiar with. Names like *manga eiga* (漫画映画 '*manga* film') or *terebi manga* (テレビ漫画 'tele-vi[sion] *manga*') were reportedly in use in the '50s and '60s, while *anime* became widespread only in the '90s (Denison, 5–6). Even if the country had been producing animation for over 50 years by that point, much of it was

6. 「皆さん。私たちが作るのはアニメーションではありません。テレビアニメです。いいですか ア・ニ・メです」

experimental pieces, short skits, popular children's tales, or propaganda films, and it took some time for the new television series format to take its place amongst all the other kinds of animation with which it would end up sharing the unifying label of *anime*.

Overseas, in the meantime, Ōtomo Katsuhiro's (大友 克洋) 1988 film *Akira* (アキラ) hit the theatres in the following year and was called all sorts of names but *anime* (Denison 2015a, 35–36). Yet it would be this title that people would refer back to after the next massive hit, Oshii Mamoru's (押井 守) *Ghost in the Shell* (*Kōkaku Kidōtai* 攻殻機動隊) released in 1995. It is not hard to see the connection between the two instant cult classics, as both are lavishly produced theatrical features depicting post-apocalyptic societies. But while *Akira*'s initial critical reception was rather mixed, its popular success forced people to take a closer look at the Japanese animation industry, and that involved adapting their terminology to appeal to the apparently massive fanbase that was already well-versed in it. This resulted in articles not only calling *Ghost in the Shell* an *anime*, but also kind enough to provide help with the pronunciation too, albeit with inconsistent transcriptions such as 'ANNIE-may' or 'ah-nee-may'[7] (38) that hinted at a (re)anglified pronunciation. Thus, the circle is complete.

There is nothing extraordinary in languages borrowing loanwords that were themselves borrowed. But for a donor language to borrow its donation back, especially so soon after, is not commonplace. Harkening back to David Crystal's line from our introduction, as far as English is concerned, the general tendency is that a language will borrow a term which may get back to the source language after a shift in meaning, and not the other way around. Such is the case of *cookie*, for instance, which re-entered Dutch in the sense of 'digital data-package' at the dawn of the Internet (De Coster 1999, 145) despite originating as a regional diminutive of *koek* 'cake' in the form of *koekie*, brought in by Dutch immigrants to the United States in the late 18th century (*Oxford Reference*). This does not mean that

7. For comparison, the standard Japanese pronunciation is simply /aɲime/. Since this form is eerily similar to the French adjective *animé* used in compounds such as *dessin animé* 'animated cartoon', some non-academics often falsely considered it to be the actual origin (see the "anime" entry in *AnimeNewsNetwork*'s lexicon for a relevant discussion).

there are no examples of English-to-English reborrowings too. *Pidgin*, today standing for a proto-language arising from the interaction of distantly or wholly unrelated languages, is a phonetic corruption of the English word 'busin[ess]' as pronounced by the Chinese during the Sino-British trade of the 17-19th centuries. Originally, it referred to the simplified trade language spoken in the region in lieu of a proper *lingua franca*, and it had returned to English in this narrow sense by 1807 (*Oxford Dictionary*). Soon, however, it would develop the abovementioned linguistic meaning, having lost both the Chinese and business associations by 1891 (Harper). This was at least 84 years in the making (over a century more likely), while the same process for 'cookie' took over two hundred years. In contrast, *anime* seems to have taken around thirty years. Dealing with a world which has shrunk enough to allow smuggled, fan-subbed media cross the Pacific in no time, but not digitised enough to allow tracing back the routes, it goes without saying that all these numbers are mere estimates based on what little reliable data we have from recollections, newspapers or official releases, and might very well be off by decades. The point of this lengthy preamble is that reborrowing may occur in a surprisingly short time, especially when part of a web as complex and ever-changing as popular culture marked by intercultural communication. Before taking a closer look at the borrowed and reborrowed terminology of the *anime-manga* fandom, however, we must take yet another historical (de)tour.

Just as Insatiable. The Case of Japanese

The English were neither the first nor the most important foreigners that Japan made contact with during its long history as an island nation. Even if we disregard the waves of possible early migrations—and we must, for any such discussion would be poised by heavy debates[8]—the influence of

8. It is commonly accepted that the islands were inhabited long before the Yayoi period from around 300 BC when migration from the continent changed the socioeconomic and cultural landscape of Japan. However, much of what is known about the indigenous Jōmon culture which newcomers blended into is speculative and under continuous scrutiny. A major archaeological scandal in the early 2000s known as the 'Japanese Palaeolithic Hoax', in which

the various Chinese dynasties alone could fill several volumes on lexicology and linguistics. Europe, admittedly, joined the game quite late, and its key players (the Portuguese, the Dutch, and later the Germans) contributed ideas rather than vocabulary. Many early European loans thus became obsolete rather quickly (bar a few prominent exceptions which we shall discuss promptly), whereas Sino-Japanese terms dominate the language to this day. Yet we must not write off Europe this easily: fast forward to the Second World War, or more precisely to the American occupation of the islands in its aftermath, and we find an entirely different landscape. If we exclude the most conservative fields such as classical literature or religious life, English borrowings are prevalent in almost all domains and registers to an extent that strikes language learners and native speakers alike. Before we narrow our focus to the specific phenomena hinted at in the title, let us briefly examine the Chinese influence, focusing on numerical data, so that the figures can speak for themselves.

In *Encyclopædia Britannica* we find that over 50% of the Japanese lexicon is of Chinese origin (2023). Their data originate from a volume of the *Cambridge Language Surveys* series by linguist Shibatani Masayoshi (柴谷 方良), and are based on three studies conducted in late 20th century. The first examined what is generally considered Japan's first 'modern' dictionary called *Genkai* (言海 'sea of words') compiled in 1889 during the Meiji-period. The vocabulary was found to be around 60% Chinese. This was followed by a study on various types of magazines from 1956, which gave an average of 47.5%, with exact values varying between 34.7–59.3%. The third was a study from ten years later focusing on newspapers, and pointed at 44.4 to 46.9% (Shibatani 1990, 142–143). While it should come as no surprise that these numbers—let us average them as 50% for simplicity—are higher than those representing words coming from European languages (1.4%, 9.8%, and 12.35%, respectively), they are higher than the number of native Japanese words too—again, depending on the media examined, the

many discoveries from the 70-90s were found by further research to have been falsified by archaeologist Fujimura Shin'ichi (藤村 新一), caused a major setback. Contemporary reports in English on the scandal unfolding are authored by Japan-based archaeology professor Charles T. Keally (2000). For a recent study on the matter, and Japan's general prehistory, see Nakazawa (2017).

rating being 48.6%, 36.7% and 37% respectively (ibid.). The sociohistorical reasons for such large-scale borrowings—in the plural—are manifold, as they occurred in several waves, but their discussion falls outside the scope of the present paper. Suffice it to say that the various readings of the characters are conventionally divided based on the specific Chinese dialect they were borrowed from and in what period, because these, in turn, determined which religious, philosophical or literary trend brought the words in. The English situation we examine will be simpler, on one hand, since its temporal range is significantly shorter and involves much less dialectal variation, but also more chaotic, as it is unfolding in the present, in an accelerated and much less systematic manner.

Let us turn to numbers once more. We have seen that the European influence in 1889 was merely 1.4%, steadily growing to 12.35% by 1966 (Shibatani, 142–143). In order to put these two dates in context we should highlight some others, marking two major turning points in the history of Japan. Year 1868 saw the Meiji Restoration come into full bloom, formally ending the country's isolationist policy after the fall of the Tokugawa shogunate, and starting a fast-paced modernisation process which required the understanding and adoption of as many western concepts as possible. As far as the lexicon was concerned, however, instead of a wave of loanwords, these early attempts first came with a massive number of new compounds and coinages. For instance, instead of borrowing the word 'gravity' or any of its cognates, they coined the term *jūryoku* (重力 'weight force') expressing the idea of gravitation in a way that is self-explanatory, at least in writing, to readers who had never encountered the concept before (Katō 1991, 352). Many such words were calques using *kanji* and their various meanings and readings combined in novel ways to express new ideas, such as the equivalent to 'real estate' *fudōsan* (不動産 'immovable property') following the French pattern of *immobilier* (350–351), or deliberate semantic broadening of the preexisting vocabulary, like repurposing the Old Chinese word for 'self-originating, self-indulgence' 自由 (read today in Japanese as *jiyū*) to mean 'freedom', as in 'freedom to act in an unconfined manner, putting what is important to the forefront' (363–364).

Such broadening of the vocabulary without borrowing was done in line with the contemporary *wakon-yousai* (和魂洋才 'Japanese spirit, Western learning') philosophy, which advocated for the adoption of Western knowledge for the benefit of the Japanese people *but* in ways that kept the Japanese spirit intact. For a while, this successfully multiplied the number of Japanese-made Chinese words (*wasei-kango*), but over time the movement lost its momentum, and after the American occupation in 1945 began reshaping the defeated country into its own image, such aspirations were all but expended, and borrowing became the favoured method instead. This too had precedent, as we have mentioned above, as there indeed were important Portuguese and Dutch terms borrowed before the country had closed its borders, terms that are still in use today. Well-known examples include Portuguese *pan* (パン 'bread', from *pão*) or *tabako* (煙草・タバコ 'cigarettes', from *tobaco*), and Dutch *kōhī* (珈琲・コーヒー 'coffee', from *koffie*) and *bīru* (麦酒・ビール 'beer', from *bier*), as well as much of the pre-modern ethnonyms such as *doitsu* (独・ドイツ 'German', from *Duits*) or *igirisu* (イギリス 'English', from *inglês*, albeit standing now for the country rather than its people). Such non-Chinese loans are collectively referred to as *gairaigo* (外来語 'words coming from outside')[9], and from the total 2964 listed in the first study mentioned above, 80.8% (2395) were of English origin, clearly overshadowing all other languages, including French, German, Italian and Dutch (147–148). Everything else scored under 1%, including Portuguese, who had fallen out of favour during the period the country was closed although attempts were made at continuing the missionary work, as well as Chinese, losing its prestige and dignity in the eyes of the Japanese for being conquered by the Manchu and losing the empire to the Westerners.

Whatever such exact numbers might suggest, determining how much of the contemporary language is actually English in origin is no easy task, despite the fact that almost all newcomers are instantly recognisable due to the general tendency to write them in *katakana.* Studies from 1970-73 report an estimate of 8% of the total Japanese vocabulary being of English origin,

9. Ironically, *gairaigo* itself is likely the calque of German *Fremdwort*, coined between 1890 and 1895 by linguist Ueda Kazutoshi (上田萬年) after returning from his studies in Germany (Frellesvig 2010, 404).

representing 94.1% of all *gairaigo* (Stanlaw, 13), but these data are also clearly obsolete today. Rapid technological advances in the early 2000s caused a surge in both the development and exportation of relevant jargon and slang terms in English all across the globe, and the media shared through these new means is also overwhelmingly (in) English, further contributing to its wider adaptation. Japanese phonetics teacher and YouTuber, Kevin O'Donnell—better known online as Dōgen—illustrates the prevalence of English loans in everyday Japanese in a comedic skit. The video is supposedly predicting how Japanese would look like in ten years (as of 2019), but ends with the lines, "It's funny because Japanese is already like this" in Japanese, to which comes the reply, "Yes", in English (0:41–44). We shall transcribe the short exchange here in Japanese but with borrowings kept in English instead of *katakana*, to make its point more visually striking (to Westerners too, since to a Japanese speaker, *katakana*-spelling is a clear enough sign).

「あっ、山本さん、long time no seeです。どうですか、最近？」

「や、office workがちょっと多くて、気分downです。」

「なるほど。僕は逆にbrainstormingのmeetingがありすぎて、motivationが上がんないです。しかも、last trainなんでwork life balanceが取れないです。」

「Japanese work styleってやっぱhardですよね。」

「やvery toughですね。Premium Fridayはいいんですけど、Plus Alphaでcoffee timeもおもしいですよね。」

「Casualでfriendlyな感じがbestですもんね。あっ、youはnext meetingでproposalを出したらどうですか？」

「おっ、nice ideaですね。うまく行ったら、lobbyにあるStarbucksのtakeoutをgetできるかもしれませんね。」

「Maybe!」

「I hope!」

「えー、日本語が直ぐにこうなっているから面白いですよね。」

「Yes.」(O'Donnell 2019)

While obviously a satire, the video correctly identifies a phenomenon that prescriptivists often complain of insofar as the 'linguistic purity' of Japanese is concerned. However, we are not here to take part in such arguments, especially since the language in question is not actually

threatened by having its vocabulary systematically replaced. Most of the expressions utilised in this skit are but partially anglified renditions of things preestablished and conventionally considered 'native', by simple means such as inserting the English equivalent or a close synonym for the head of certain phrases or common interjections, as well as including some proper names—all following the 'rule of cool' without affecting the core grammatical structure of the language. That is most evident if we look at the particles habitually inserted between the English words, or the accompanying auxiliaries or occasional affixes, helping them integrate effortlessly into the sentences. For instance, the set phrase 'long time no see' in English, being of pidgin origin (Oxford, "long" P.3.l.), does not require any auxiliary, but here the polite copula *desu* is attached to it, in line with how its Japanese equivalent *hisashiburi* (久しぶり) would behave in the same position. Another great example is to be found in the next line: *kibun down* (気分ダウン) is a non-existent combination of *kibun warui* (気分悪い 'mood [is] bad') and its English pair 'feeling down'. We could supplant nearly every anglicism in this manner to re-Japanise the text, although the likes of 'Starbucks' or 'brainstorming' better remain unchanged—unless we aim for equally comical results, falling to the other extreme and translating them verbatim.

When discussing the ready acceptance of loanwords into Japanese, Shibatani's main explanation still holds water: the language lacks nominal inflections (145), so anything can be used as a noun while the previously mentioned parts of speech take care of the rest. What does not go so easily as morphosyntactic adaptation is the phonetic one, which we could not illustrate well with our transcript either, having replaced the *katakana*-spelt words with their English equivalents. Some of those words are merely respellings in a more phonetically consistent manner, such as *yū* (ユー 'you') or *daun* (ダウン 'down'), but others like *mochibēshon* (モチベーション 'motivation') or *wāku-raifu-baransu* (ワーク・ライフ・バランス 'work-life balance') are a little challenging for untrained ears and would probably be indecipherable for native English speakers on first encounter. This stands for well-established borrowings too, like the abovementioned *kōhī* 'coffee', pronounced as /koːçiː/, which is relatively far from its European sources because of its lengthened vowels and palatal fricative.

We have mentioned in our introduction that foreign words entering the Japanese language need to abide by its comparatively strict phonetic constraints and spelling conventions, but here we should add a temporal dimension to the issue as well, for languages change, and their phonotactics change along with them. This means two things that concern us here. Firstly, the Japanese pronunciation of *kōhī*[10] was likely closer to the Dutch original *koffie* at the time of its borrowing than it is today, and the distance only grows if we contrast it with English, which is not its true source. Moreover, even though such borrowings have been around for centuries, since contact with foreigners before the Meiji Restoration was heavily regulated and restricted to government-authorised trading posts, direct exposure to the phonemes and sound-combinations missing from the Japanese inventory was rather limited. A loanword borrowed at the port would be spread further inland by natives only, with its roughly approximated pronunciation being continuously reinforced, soon becoming well-established. The situation changed drastically after the Second World War, and with the exposure to foreign languages already extended to the wider population during the Meiji Period, new *katakana*-transcriptions began to be invented to approximate the original pronunciation of loanwords as closely as possible. With these novel ways we could now respell 'coffee' from *kōhī* (コーヒー) to *kofi* (コフィ) or, since English is much more prominent now than Dutch, even to *kafi* (カフィ). These forms are unattested, however, exactly because of the abovementioned fact of the word being so well-established already. Coffee culture in Japan is nigh on par with that of tea, despite the circa thousand years between their respective introductions to the country (Heiss and Heiss 2007, 10.28; White 2012, 17), and so the need for a more accurate transcription will be naturally overshadowed by the conservative desire to keep the traditional form intact, preserving its history.

10. The sound denoted by 'h' in modern transcription standards has undergone a series of consonantal shifts where the reconstructed original bilabial plosive /p/ first lenited to its fricative counterpart /ɸ/, which gradually softened to today's palatal /ç/. The labiodental equivalent of /ɸ/ is /f/, a connection more obvious than with the pharyngeal /h/ of which /ç/ is the allophone before /i/. For more details see Miyake (2003, 74), Bentley (2001, 48–49), Frellesvig (2010, 34–38), or Frellesvig and Whitman (2008, 2).

Less culturally loaded borrowings are more likely to undergo a respelling process. Taking a look at the Japanese *Wikipedia* article for 'violin', for instance, we can see how the new version *vaiorin* (ヴァイオリン) is featured in the title, while the original *baiorin* (バイオリン) is given a secondary status, featured as an alternative. Much like its unvoiced pair /f/ in 'coffee', the voiced labiodental fricative /v/ is also missing from Japanese, and so it was customarily replaced by the bilabial plosive /b/, the closest voiced sound in the present phonetic inventory, before a character for /v/ was invented[11]. In contrast to 'violin', the word 'version', even though another English loan starting with /v/, displays the old-style transcription *bājon* (バージョン) in the title and the new form *vājon* (ヴァージョン) as a variant mentioned in the lead section. A third example, 'volleyball', only features the old-style transcription *barēbōru* (バレーボール) and no alternative whatsoever, despite being newer than all the others. While not a thorough study by any means, such quick searches readily show how the attribution and acceptance of new forms are often arbitrary.

Age is one contributing factor which does not apply solely to words but also to speakers. During Japan's 'closed country' period, whoever had not heard foreign words being pronounced by the foreigners themselves could not be able to contrast the two pronunciations, let alone reproduce the so-called 'correct' one. For them, there was little use for respellings. Apparently, this still holds true, most people being aware of what these strange new orthographies mean yet not making any differentiation in speech. They generally stick to the traditional pronunciation regardless of the spelling variant, keeping all potential homonymy[12].

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11. The *katakana* character ヴ is used to denote /v/, appearing first in the 1860 English-Japanese dictionary written by its inventor, reformist educator Fukuzawa Yukichi (福澤 諭吉). Its popularity, however, fluctuated, along with other non-standard *kana* and *gairaigo*, their use alternately recommended or discouraged by the authorities, depending on the dominant ideologies. Currently, the conservative method is favoured, so in 2019 the last two countries that still had ヴ in their names as leftovers from the reformist wave officially returned to being spelt with /b/ (Koizumi 2019). In the absence of an authoritarian force, as in popular culture, entertainment media and online discourse, one can encounter ヴ on a daily basis.
12. For an interesting series of debates about whether speakers can pronounce certain combinations and if so, why don't they, see a relevant *Reddit* thread, with particular focus on user mrggy's reply (Moon_Atomizer 2023).

Resuming the case of *animation*, there is another point regarding the problematics of adaptation left undiscussed, and that is clipping. Japan loves abbreviations, and keeping the phonotactics of its language in mind, it is hardly surprising. As mentioned in our introduction, the fundamental phonological unit of Japanese is a *mora*. Much like syllables with which they are frequently confused, *morae* can be made up of single phonemes (such as the vowels *a*, *i*, *u*, *e*, *o*) but they are more often a combination of them (in the form of syllable sets like *ka*, *ki*, *ku*, *ke*, *ko*). The semivowel /j/ can palatalise certain consonants (e.g. *gyūnyū* 牛乳 'cow's milk'), resulting in what can arguably be considered a cluster though often not perceived as such, and not counted as two *morae*. There are other sounds that can constitute a *mora*, however, such as the nasal ん (transcribed as *n*) which changes its realisation based on its phonetic environment (e.g. /ŋ/ in *ongaku* 音楽 'music' but /m/ in *shinpai* 心配 'worry') and the glottal stop /ʔ/ usually denoted by double consonants in transcription (*hakken* 発見 'discovery'). This latter sound typically occurs in conjugated forms and *kanji* compounds, arising from vowel reduction accompanied by consonantal assimilation. *Hakken*, for example, is made up of the root morphemes *hatsu* 'emit, disclose' and *ken* 'see, examine'), and the reduction is marked when spelling with *hiragana* as っ written instead of the original syllable from which it had been reduced. In words where vowel reduction is not accompanied by assimilation, such as in the polite copula *desu* (です) becoming something like *des'* in speech, the change is not reflected in writing. Since *gairaigo* are neither native nor are customarily written with *kanji*, their geminate consonants almost always feature this sign, albeit in its katakana counterpart ッ, such as in *shokku* (ショック 'shock').

The urge to abbreviate stems not from reduction, but from insertion—more precisely vocalic epenthesis. In the case of non-geminate clusters, helper vowels are introduced to aid pronunciation, and so 'brainstorming' from the comedic skit above turns into *bureinsutōmingu* (ブレインストーミング), which is quite a mouthful. For the Japanese this is especially bothersome, considering how concise a Sino-Japanese compound with the same number of *morae* would be, theoretically able to express seven different

ideas coming together (*bu-rei-su-tō-min-gu*), as opposed to the two from 'brain' and 'storming'. This is grossly inefficient for a ten-*morae* word, and that is why we get shortenings such as *anime* instead of *animēshon*. English is, of course, no stranger to this, let us think of everyday words such as 'ad', 'flu' or 'phone' that are illustrative of final, medial, and initial clippings respectively. A major difference between the languages is how Japanese favours clipped compounds in situations where English would resort to acronyms instead—consider *pasokon* (パソコン) and 'PC', both deriving from 'personal computer' (*pāsonaru konpyūtā* パーソナルコンピューター). What stops the word 'brainstorming' from being abbreviated in a similar fashion might be the fact that the resulting form *buresuto* (ブレスト) would be identical to the rendering of 'breast'.

Clipping can co-occur with other forms of word-formation without much difficulty. In fact, one of the most famous Japanese (re)borrowings into English omitted from our introductory paragraphs is a prime example of this: *karaoke* comes from a quasi-prefix denoting emptiness (*kara*空) and the clipped form of English 'orchestra' (*ōkesutora* オーケストラ), either expressing the idea that only the orchestra is performing, or that it is lacking something—namely the vocals, which needs to be provided by the player. Such compounds are extremely common in Japanese, especially when one or both parts are foreign, because of the above-mentioned preference for shortening. They need not always be abbreviated to become part of a compound, however, especially if they were short to begin with. For example, the name Godzilla from the eponymous monster film franchise is a portmanteau from the borrowed *gorira* (ゴリラ 'gorilla') and the native word for 'whale' (*kujira* 鯨・クジラ), neither of which are shortened as constituents, but blend together like 'smog' from 'smoke' and 'fog'.

Having become more familiar with the general tendencies and patterns of Anglo-Japanese lexical interactions, as well as the rules governing them, let us finally turn our attention to borrowings and reborrowings used in contemporary fandom-terminology, as promised in the title of this paper.

Initial Hypotheses & Methodology

Confident that an insider's perspective would be of great service while gathering data tied to the *anime* and *manga* communities online, we have set out to build our corpus by consulting glossaries and listing the most common borrowings used by the fandom. Our initial hypothesis was to find roughly the same number of words from English and Japanese, with a significant portion of them being reborrowings—i.e. originating in one language, undergoing certain morphophonemic and semantic changes in the other, and finally being reborrowed into the source language. The word *anime* is exemplary of English-to-English reborrowings; the expectation was to find instances in the other direction as well. This would eventually turn out to be unwarranted.

During the analysis, a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed. Ten lists were consulted in total, out of which six were from authored sources (Adair, Constant, Snodgrass, Kraft, Toh, Vergara) and four from community-edited informational sites (*AnimeNewsNetwork*, *Animeph*, *MangaWiki*, *Wikipedia*). The number of entries and/or terms mentioned overall falls between 14 and 55 in the former group, and 77 and 119 in the latter. Besides these fan-compiled glossaries, two academic encyclopaediae (Galbraith 2013; Clements and McCarthy 2015; 106 and 46 terms, respectively) and the language-learning blog *Japanese with Anime* (134 terms) was also consulted for more extensive insight and crosschecking of information.

We have opted to select one hundred terms through which to illustrate the various phenomena worth discussing insofar as borrowings are concerned. Settling for a hundred was primarily for convenience: this was the approximate number of terms that appeared at least three times across all the sources consulted, ensuring that they were as commonly used as claimed. During the initial data collection, all terms that were featured on the lists had been gathered, irrespective of their relevance to the present study, but the inclusion criteria applied by the different compilers often

proved to be arbitrary and grossly inconsistent, and so the entries were subsequently merged and filtered based on various criteria.

As noted in the introduction, variant transcriptions and spelling were unified, so entries such as *shojo*, *shōjo* and *shoujo* (少女 'young girl') all standing for the same demographic category appear only once. Abbreviated forms, acronyms and initialisms standing for the same idea with little to no semantic difference were also grouped as one entry, such as *bishi*, *bishie* and *bishōnen* (美少年) all referring to the same character trope of 'beautiful boy'; or 'OVA', 'OAV' and 'OAD' all denoting direct-to-video releases, labelled respectively as 'original video animation', 'original animation video' and 'original animation DVD / *anime* disc'. Related terms resulting from clippings such as *dōjin* and *dōjinshi* (同人誌 'self-published work') as well as variant compounds with the same root and meaning like 'fan service' and 'service cut', were also considered one entry. Same denotation does not warrant merging if the forms are morphologically and etymologically distinct: the *wasei-eigo* compound 'boys' love' and its abbreviation 'BL' are thus one entry, but the corresponding native term *shōnen-ai* (少年愛) from which they were calqued is a different one, while the word *yaoi* (やおい・ヤオイ), an obscure portmanteau which also denotes homosexuality but is completely unrelated to all of the above, is a third.

Several words were excluded, even if featured on lists and often used within the community, if they do not originate from it, and are simply part of the wider glossary of popular culture, entertainment media, and international slang. Examples include 'canon', 'crossover', 'furry', as well as technical terms such as 'bootleg', 'BD' (Blu-ray disk), or 'CGI' (computer-generated imagery). However, the meaning of common English words sometimes narrows in Japanese either due to specified usage or as a result of abbreviation. This tendency can be adopted by the global fandom, as is the case of 'opening' and 'ending' referring to the respective credit scenes that play during *anime* episodes and films, or more specifically to the original pop song featured. In such cases, the terms were not excluded. This does not apply to generic terms narrowed by adding the 'J-' prefix, such as J-pop, J-horror, or J-drama, which are little more than exonymic labels.

As we are examining English usage first and foremost, most simple words of Japanese origin remain included, even if not specifically linked to *anime* or *manga*, if that is what brought them in or helped them get established in slang, for example *nani* (何・なに 'what'), *sugoi* (すごい 'awesome'), *kawaii* (かわいい 'cute') or *baka* (バカ 'stupid). Combining these with a keyword like 'meme' would produce hundreds of search results on *Google Images*, and their contents would be overwhelmingly centred around *anime* and *manga*. Some of the lists featured words that were already widely known in English, however, such as the drink *sake* (酒) or phrases like *sayōnara* (さようなら 'farewell'); these were promptly excluded. Entries that are clearly serving as definitions or explanations to commonly heard lexemes for fans interested in learning the language—such as pronouns, adverbs, grammatical particles, etc.—are also excluded unless they gained any new connotations within the fandom. Given how 103 entries scored 3 or above on the list out of the total 328, only three exclusions were necessary to be made in this range: the already mentioned 'J-pop', a popular snack quite unrelated to *anime* and *manga* called 'pocky', and the various copular forms (*desu* and *de gozaru*) which were grouped during the data collecting as they were mentioned in the same entries on the lists too. Thus, we are left with exactly one hundred.

The terms that remained after the exclusion process were gathered in a spreadsheet and were listed alphabetically according to the English or transcribed name alongside their respective Japanese counterparts and other variants, acronyms or initialisms where relevant. They were also colour-coded based on provenience and simplified evolution, which was marked though not detailed due to special limitations. Lastly, the terms were tagged for categories such as 'genre label', 'demographic group', or 'story trope', as well as for the specific linguistic phenomena they were illustrative of, such as clipping, abbreviation or translation, for quick statistical analysis.

Simplifying the etymological journeys taken by the terms was necessary, given how the twists and turns taken by the words during their development generally cannot be traced back accurately, even if their

starting points and current forms are evident. While the popular claim that nothing ever disappears from the Internet might be true, much of these crosslinguistic interactions began on paper and other physical media, the traces of which should rather be sought in the archives of fan conventions and school clubs; messy drawers, attics and garages; and most cluttered of all, human memory. Consequently, the present study can only serve as a preliminary look at the issues discussed, and every conclusion should be met with a grain of salt.

Analysis of Selected Examples

One of our sources—which also happens to be one of the most influential reference works on *anime* in English—was found to be quite conservative when it comes to terminology questions. In it, we find the following statement:

> Beyond the words "manga" and "anime," we have tried to avoid the obstructively arcane jargon of fandom. We intend to make anime accessible to every reader, so as much as possible we have used terms traceable in any good dictionary. Anime is increasingly targeted at an international audience and can be described in any of the wide variety of languages into which it's translated—the abuse of terms such as *hentai*, *shojo*, and *otaku* only serves to alienate the general reader (Clements and McCarthy 2006, xv).

A later edition goes on to add that, "We realize that this will annoy those fans who want their hobby to be impenetrable and 'untranslatable' to outsiders. They should get over themselves" (2015, xiv).

One can easily imagine the exchanges that probably occurred during the nine years between the two editions that led to the inclusion of this last line. One might also argue, however, that by *not* using their proper terminology, any attempts at making the fandom and its products of interest accessible to the wider public are doomed to fail, if the thick black

fog covering it is simply being ignored instead of being dispersed. Even if interest is stirred, any entry into the fandom will be severely hindered by the newcomers' inability to make sense of the discussions surrounding their newfound interests, let alone participate in them. To understand the problem, we need to dissociate from the comfortable position the internet puts us in, being now able to find whatever we need in mere seconds—in "good" dictionaries, as the paragraph above suggests, but also in not so "good" ones. The newcomers that cannot rely on these, or who pick up first the alternative or translated terminology encountered in works with similar philosophies might subsequently find themselves just as alienated when the community does not seem to accept them as those turned off by the "impenetrable" terminology. Group identity is enforced by such "obstructively arcane jargon", which is there just as much to protect those inside as it is to keep outsiders out.

There is, of course, a restrictive tendency at play here, already hinted at in our introduction and confirmed by the paragraph above, for Western fans not only tend to exoticize these narrowed categories of media for their own entertainment but can also get quite defensive when someone expands them back, calling *manga* and *anime* mere comics or cartoons. As previously mentioned, this inclusivity-problem is virtually non-existent in Japan, where people treat these as umbrella terms—knowing very well that they are but a format of media which can include things both of high and low prestige, encompassing any imaginable theme, genre, or style. In the West, on the other hand, they are often seen simply as a genre, and we can find examples, ironically, even among the blurbs of a book specifically centred around *anime* ("Active Anime" in Drazen 2014), even though the authors of such reference works and academic writings repeatedly address the issue in their introductory remarks (Poitras 2001, 7; Lamarre 2009, 10; Clements 2013, 3; Denison 2015a, 1–2). As far as online interaction is concerned, we can still find debates about why and whether *anime* is or is not a genre label (*MyAnimeList* 2015, *Reddit* 2017, *Anime Forums* 2017, *Quora* 2022).

In Japan, as we have already discussed, the difficulty lies in telling *anime* apart from other forms of animated media that were already given

Japanese names. One contender, *dōga* (動画 'moving images') even managed to get on our initial list, appearing in two of the consulted sources, albeit with different connotations: as a less common synonym for *anime* in Clements and McCarthy (2015, 37), and as in-betweens in the animation process (Toh 2022). Given how the term shares the second logograph 画 with *manga*, both denoting certain kinds of pictures, it should be a logical counterpart to it, much more fitting than the foreign *anime*, and yet it is not. In Japanese usage both of the above meanings are secondary to 'video', in the primary sense of amateur recordings and short films such as what one would find on *YouTube*, while *anime* is still, first and foremost, restricted to professionally made productions released by a studio. At the same time, *manga* also has a foreign counterpart, *komikku* (コミック 'comic') that could, alternatively, go with *anime*, but the situation with *dōga* is mirrored, as it is not commonly used as such. In our study too it only appeared twice. Since *manga* has such a long domestic history (see Itō 2008 for a quick overview), the format needed neither introduction nor a new name, and so while *anime* was embraced and turned Japanese through clipping, *komikku* and its plural variant *komikkusu* remain incurably foreign—though no less fashionable.

As soon as such imported products (re)enter foreign territory, another clash occurs, now with the domestic categories occupying the space the new media are trying to break into. Since both animation and cartoons were widespread in the West, *anime* and *manga* started with the same disadvantage as the word 'comic(s)' in Japan. Parallels can be found, comparisons drawn, and judgements are made both within and without fandom, but the easiest way to differentiate categories in such conflicts is to produce a new denomination simultaneously with the products. Thus, we get to the oft-repeated exclamation: 'it's not a cartoon, it's *anime*!', even if the new term is not exactly new, nor is it completely foreign. The point is, it labels the new so it can be contrasted with the old, dressing it in fine garments, lending it an exotic and mysterious air, making the media—and by extension the people consuming it—appear special. We stress this again because it comes especially handy with things requiring some discretion, and thus, naturally, the foreign terms will be preferred to the naturalised ones. We

could then say, 'it's not porn, it's *hentai*!', since people would not want the negative connotations attached to the preexisting categories to spread over to those newly brought in. Needless to say, this solution comes with only short-term benefits, because the more often the excuse is used, the more publicity the term gains, and people will not only grow to learn what the cryptic new coinages mean but will make new associations—sometimes better, sometimes worse.

While a little unfitting, taking a better look at the word *hentai* would be beneficial here, first because it was among the most popular terms featured on the lists, and second, since it has undergone a much more intricate series of lexical shifts than *anime* did. Its Old Chinese etymon is made up of the characters for 'change' and 'appearance' (變態)[13], and it is still used in the literal, zoological sense for metamorphosis in both Chinese and Japanese—which borrowed the term quite early on. A secondary meaning stems from the adjectival sense of the first character 變 meaning 'transformed, grotesque, abnormal'. In Japanese, too, on its own, it functions as an adjective for 'strange'. At the same time, the compound 變態 retained the meanings of both transformation and abnormality, simplified in writing to 変態 and pronounced as *hentai*. Later, it was the second sense that ended up developing further, namely in the field of psychological pathology. Richard von Krafft-Ebing's 1886 work *Psychopathia Sexualis* had been translated into Japanese in 1913 as *Hentai seiyaku shinri* (変態性欲心理 'The Psychology of Abnormal Sexual Desires'). Rough or incomplete translations are known to have been circulating within medical circles as early as 1909[14] by the time army physician Mori Rintarō (森 林太郎) published a novel entitled *Vita Sexualis* (*Wita sekusuarisu* ヰタ・セクスアリス) under his more well-known pen name Mori Ōgai (森 鷗外). The word soon left the circles of medical specialists from then on and was picked up by the masses to mean 'pervert' or 'perversion' during this heightened interest in

13. Simplified to 变态 in today's standard Mandarin and transcribed as *biàntài*. For old pronunciations, descendants, and related vocabulary, see *Wiktionary*.

14. There exists an even earlier translation from 1894 by the Japanese Forensic Society with the title *Shikijōkyō-hen* (色情狂編 'A Compilation of Sexual Manias') that had been banned by the government and which does not feature the term *hentai* in its current sense, making it an unlikely candidate. The text is now available publicly in the National Diet's Digital Library (Krafft-Ebing).

sexuality, losing much, though not all, of its negative connotations. When it entered English in the early 90s it was to differentiate the early adult *anime* releases in the United States from live-action pornographic materials, quickly developing into a genre label which does not exist in Japanese (Galbraith 2013, 99; McLelland 2006).

This term—despite, or perhaps exactly because of, its inappropriateness—is of particular importance to us. As noted, in 2005 it yielded 7 million results when searched online; more than twice the amount 'normal' Japanese loans like *sushi*, *samurai* or *geisha* did (McLelland 2006). If we replicated the experiment today, we would get circa 1.94 billion hits for *hentai*, and 868, 399 and 88.7 million, respectively, for the other three examples[15] averaging 451.9. While McLelland does not give an exact number, this average is only 23.29% of the 1.94 billion given for *hentai*, making the latter not 'more than twice', but more than four times as popular almost two decades later. We leave it to the readers to wonder why the astounding growth in popularity when this is, arguably, a subcultural product, and a quite sensitive one at that.

While we find only a few explicit terms on our final list, readers might be assured that a significant portion of borrowings is made up by the labels for various kinds of graphic content. Those that were widespread and popular enough to remain in the top one hundred are mostly genre labels and thematic tropes, for instance the previously mentioned 'BL' standing for 'boys' love'. Interestingly, while it appears in 10 out of the 13 sources consulted, its counterpart 'girls' love' (GL) only features in 2. This has less to do with neglecting the latter genre (or gender) than with lexical preferences: both tropes have Japanese equivalents that are short and much less conspicuous, *yaoi* (ヤオイ) and *yuri* (ユリ) respectively, and they indeed feature 12 out of 13 times, often as the main entries under which the English *wasei-eigo* compounds are listed as synonyms (see Toh as an example). When *hentai* is contrasted with these two, it tends to refer to stories depicting heterosexual relationships only[16].

15. *Google*, accessed 21 February 2024.

16. For a detailed evolution of the word's connotations in and outside of Japan see Josephy-Hernández (2017).

There is another term related to sexuality which scored high: *ecchi*, also appearing 12 times, meaning something quite close to *hentai*, for the simple reason that it derives from it. While the latter had indeed gained popularity with time, it was often avoided because of its easily discernible meaning, so that today the less allusive *adult* (*adaruto* アダルト) or the informal *erotic* (*ero* エロ) prenominals are used for sexually explicit *anime* in Japanese. It is not necessary, however, to rely on such borrowings; if someone wanted to stick to native terms while still considering *hentai* a little too strong. There is also the possibility to abbreviate it. The initial letter of its transcribed form, 'H', is the preferred method, and it is pronounced as if it were the English letter /ɛɪtʃ/—or, more naturally for the Japanese ear, as /ettɕi/, resulting in the respelling *ecchi* (*etchi* エッチ). This euphemistic *H* was already in use as early as 1952—as an accusation, calling out a groper—but its meaning steadily drifted away from *hentai*'s harsher, clinical implications to the more conventional 'inappropriate' (McLelland). By the '80s it had become common use, and it was the go-to way of referring to anything sexual without sounding too explicit (Galbraith 2013, 94; 175). It too was borrowed into English, also becoming a genre but denoting a lighter flavour of *hentai* in the fan communities—more naughty and only suggestive, not outright sexual, and almost never implying perversion or fetishism (Clements and McCarthy 2015, 39; Josephy-Hernández 2017, 175). Neither of the terms became genre categories in Japan in their own right, however, just because they are being used as such in the West; they are reserved as adjectives either for people doing indecent things, or by extension to the act of committing them (McLelland; Denison 2015a, 62–63; Josephy-Hernández 175)—consider, for instance, the verbal expression *etchi-suru* (エッチする 'to do lewd things'). When the Japanese talk about *hentai* or *ecchi* in relation to genres, they use them in a descriptive sense, attached to an actual category name, as in 'H *manga* magazines' (Morizono, interviewed in Schodt, 209) unlike Western usage, which treats them as genres on their own.

Before ending the discussion, let us note a relatively new development in the West. On the video-sharing platform *YouTube*, uttering certain words

can prevent creators from monetising their content or even resulting in the video being taken down. In order to avoid this, Australian YouTuber Joey Bizinger, himself of Japanese descent, began pronouncing the word *hentai* as /henti/ (2019, 1:25–1:45), likely reversing the English tendency to pronounce 'i' as /ai/. He also started using fanciful respellings in his titles, such as *HƎ𝒩𝒯𝒜* (2021) or ℌệ𝔫𝔱ằ𝔦 (2020), so the algorithm cannot pick up on the questionable content. Such is the journey words can take across the centuries, and the closer we get to the present, the faster the changes. Despite our initial expectations, however, no other item on our spreadsheet has undergone so many turns.

Fifty-three entries follow the general pattern of a Japanese or Sino-Japanese term borrowed in its transcribed form into English, which is by far the most populous category. Besides the already mentioned *manga* and the more explicit thematic categories, several demographic groups are included, namely: *shōjo* (少女), *shōnen* (少年), *seinen* (青年), and *josei* (女性), respectively standing for media oriented to girls, boys, men, and women. These are commercial labels for categorising *manga* in Japan, each coming with its own set of styles, character and story tropes, and to a certain extent genres too, and thus are favoured over their literal English equivalents. The fifth category, *kodomo* 'children', short for *kodomo-muke* (子供向け 'children-oriented') is the exception, and appears much less frequently than the other four (4 out of 13 to 8 or above for those aforementioned). It is usually referred to simply as 'kids' *anime*' and similar descriptive phrases instead, if at all. Beyond the target audience of these media their (stereo) typified characters are also using borrowed labels: terms like *tsundere* (ツンデレ), *chibi* (ちび) or *fujoshi* (腐女子)[17] are all well-known within the community but would require lengthy explanations for lack of direct English equivalents. Pure adjectives like *kawaii* (かわいい 'cute') or *urusai* (煩い 'noisy, bothersome') are much easier to translate yet are kept in Japanese nonetheless, since they are frequently heard in *anime* and can easily be

17. *Tsundere* are characters who are initially cold and aggressive, unaware of or concealing their romantic interest, but gradually become cordial. *Chibi* denotes the stereotypical anime-style with cute, small characters. *Fujoshi* are fans of the *yaoi* genre. All three tend to refer primarily though not exclusively to females.

picked up. Other specialised terminology is borrowed for formats, such as *tankōbon* (単行本 'independent book', a small-sized paperback in Japan), *yonkoma* (4コマ 'four-panel [*manga*]') or *dōjinshi* (同人誌 'self-published works'). Some of these undergo strange modifications—for instance *dōjinshi* is often being clipped to *dōjin* in English, even though this part of the compound in Japanese denotes the literary club or circle in which amateur artists first showcase their works, and as such it is not used for the products themselves. Excluding such oddities, however, none of the fifty-three terms undergo any significant change in English, nor do they return to Japanese with new senses acquired 'abroad'. Thus, the closest mirroring the route taken by *anime* is *ecchi*, but it is debatable whether the anglicised pronunciation of an otherwise native word abbreviation truly counts as a reborrowing from the Japanese point of view, or if it is merely an odd form of *wasei-eigo*.

We have two additional entries that are of Japanese origin but are majorly used in their translated forms in English: the genre of *mahō-shōjo* (魔法少女) more commonly known as 'magical girl', and the trope of reversing certain roles such as in 'reverse harem' (where a female protagonist is being surrounded by multiple suitors or love interests) or 'reverse trap' (where a character appears to be male but is revealed to be female). The Japanese version of the latter would feature the loanwords 'harem' and 'trap' in their transcribed forms in katakana (*hāremu* ハーレム and *torappu* トラップ, respectively) but would swap 'reverse' for the native prefix *gyaku-* (逆) used for such purposes, resulting in a mixed compound. In English, the loanblend forms featuring 'reverse' are what we encounter almost exclusively, but there were several other mixed compounds found during the study out of which 4 are used in English too. One such entry is 'visual kei', sometimes abbreviated to *v-kei*, coming from the English word 'visual' combined with the Japanese suffix *-kei* (系) meaning 'style'. It stands for a subcultural movement that gained popularity in the West at the same time as *anime* and the Internet did (Pfeifle 2013, 79) and which spread abroad much further than it otherwise could have due to *anime* conventions (83-84)—hence its inclusion in our study.

The next big category is that of terms originating in the West, a grand total of 41 entries. Since we have detailed such cases repeatedly, in the following we shall discuss only one representative of each subgroup in detail. As we have noted with 'comics', many English words entering Japanese are transcribed into *katakana* only to regain their traditional English spelling upon return. In fact, it is debatable if we can even speak about return in these cases, as the words have not undergone any changes in either form or meaning. We might know how culturally loaded the term 'idol' has become in Japan, for instance, but there is no visual indication present in writing, as no one would spell it *aidoru* (アイドル) following the Japanese pattern, and the intermediate form *idoru* occasionally found in print (see Galbraith 2013, 102) is also nowhere to be seen online. We have exactly 30 of these words, although many are actually *wasei-eigo* compounds like 'light novel' of which we know that they were created in Japan, even if that is not evident. Many such words exist even outside the *anime* and *manga* fandom and eventually found their way back into English, like 'love hotel', 'level up' and probably 'salaryman'. None would be seen as a reborrowing just because their constituents have been borrowed by the Japanese to form new compounds. They are pseudo-anglicisms at best, similar to how new scientific vocabulary was built in the West from Latin and Ancient Greek roots.

Occasionally, certain modifications made in Japanese persist while others get re-anglified, as in the case of the 'mecha' genre, whose name comes from the word 'mechanical', but is clipped, much like *anime*, and used in that form in English when we are not merely referencing something 'mechanical' but fiction featuring giant biomorphic machinery. Unlike *anime*, however, the clipped word retains its form exactly as it was spelt in the original (*mecha*nical) instead of abiding by the rules of *katakana*-transcription (which would yield *meka* instead). Both 'idol' and 'mecha' would thus be counted as wholly English while *anime*—keeping the spelling of its transcribed form and acquiring a new pronunciation—is treated separately, labelled as *gairaigo* on the spreadsheet for having occurred in Japanese, and from the perspective of English amounting to a reborrowing proper.

Not all *gairaigo* are reborrowed, however, nor are they all necessarily English. A French loan, *cours* (*kūru* クール), for instance, initially follows the same path as an English loan. Borrowed to denote a set of episodes that airs without interruptions for a period of 13 weeks—roughly corresponding to a season in the natural, rather than broadcasting sense (*Goo Dictionary*)—it is used as such in English too within the community, albeit reanalysed as a plural, leading to the invention of a new singular form 'cour' (Clements and McCarthy 2015, 38). As of now, it does not seem to have re-entered French in this specific sense.

There are other kinds of changes that can yield forms far enough from their originals to be included in the subgroup of *gairaigo*, although deciding on where to draw the line is rather subjective. The word 'cosplay' (*kosupure* コスプレ), for instance, is counted because it is a portmanteau, a *wasei-eigo* made from 'costume' (*kosuchūmu* コスチューム) and 'play' (*purē* プレー). Were it not a blend it could reasonably be put in the former category instead. Initialisms and acronyms are a difficult case because they do not readily show either morphological blending or phonetic respelling, making it hard to determine whether they occurred first in English, or in Japanese as abbreviated *wasei-eigo* terms. Words like 'OP' and 'ED', which refer to the opening and ending credits of *anime*, or the previously mentioned OVA standing for 'original video animation', seem to be of Japanese origin (Clements and McCarthy 2015, 37; 40), while OST for 'original soundtrack' likely originates from Hollywood blockbusters instead, although no definitive source can be found for it either. In all these cases, much like with 'mecha', any change that might occur during transcription tends to be ignored upon the words' return to English. Moreover, the letters chosen when forming the acronym are also based on the original English letters instead of the transcribed ones, as evidenced by the *wasei-eigo* compounds 'visual novel' and 'light novel' becoming 'VN' and 'LN' instead of 'BN' and 'RN' after *bijuaru noberu* (ビジュアルノベル) and *raito noberu* (ライトノベル). In light of these, it seems reasonable to place them into the first subgroup, but again, their *wasei-eigo* status complicates the matter. Another borderline case is that of *ero* from 'erotic' which is the same both in its

original English and its transcribed form clipped from *erochikku* (エロチック), making any separation based purely on spelling impossible. This is where we need to turn to semantics once more.

Clipped loans of both kinds can be combined to form new *wasei-eigo* compounds, as in the case of *eroguro*[18] made up of the previously discussed *ero* paired with *guro* from *gurotesuku* (グロテスク 'grotesque'). The first part, as we have seen, is ambiguous, but the second clearly follows the pattern of *anime*, sticking to the Japanese transcription instead of being turned back into 'gro-'. And still, together they stand for what one would expect them to despite the clipping and blending, undergoing little to no semantic change even after being reborrowed. This is unlike *anime*, which became narrower, or other *gairaigo* that can be contrasted with their etymons in various other ways. There were only two other examples, neither of which were clipped or modified in any way beyond using their *katakana*-transcription. The first is the word 'girl' (or more precisely, its slang derivative 'gal') which is rendered as *gyaru* (ギャル) when referring to the eponymous subculture. The second comes from 'wife', which retains its transcribed form *waifu* (from ワイフ) to signal that it refers to someone's fictional love interest (who is feminine but not necessarily female) instead of a married woman or someone's legal female partner, as in standard English usage. These can unquestionably be seen as reborrowings in the sense we established at the beginning of this paper.

Overall, we can say the terms of English and foreign origins were roughly equal in number (55 Japanese, 41 foreign), but far from balanced as regards the amount of change they tend to undergo in exogenous linguistic contexts. Japanese terms might have their pronunciation butchered in English just as the English in Japanese, but they rarely undergo the many rounds of simplification and semantic shifts the latter do however short their 'stay' in Japan. Whether this springs from the power imbalance of the two interacting cultures or the specific features of their languages and writing systems, is still very much up to debate, and varies from case to case.

18. The word originates from the *ero-guro-nansensu* movement of the 1930s, an aesthetic trend that combined eroticism with the grotesque and the nonsensical, to express the extremes of modern life and its anxieties (Lackney 2020, 7–8).

As far as the amount of reborrowings is concerned, our initial expectations were not met, as no Japanese equivalent has been found to mirror the likes of *anime*, *gyaru*, or *waifu*, besides the borderline case of *ecchi*, the reason for which may or may not lie in the fact that the study was conducted majorly through the lens of English.

In Lieu of Conclusions

Borrowing comes in many flavours, and while we cannot ascribe borrowings solely to happenstance, we cannot confidently say that they do so because of linguistic prestige and power relations either. Examining the sociohistorical context of specific instances of language contact is unarguably crucial, for it may determine the direction of the borrowing, but we must not forget that these are but tendencies. Intentional, learnt and guided borrowing can occur on the surface, while a concurrent trend may be underway in *niche* domains. As far as the *anime* and *manga* communities are concerned, their coincidental development with that of the Internet made the borrowing, spreading and further evolution of their specific terminology not only much faster, but more transparent as well. We need not consult obscure glossaries compiled in the '80s by enthusiastic fans of the media to get well-versed in the language of the subculture. We might face difficulties, on the other hand, since the faster these developments, the harder to keep track of them. While we have not pointed it out explicitly anywhere, the list of terms compiled for this study includes many slashes and parentheses, despite our best efforts to keep it simple and concise, for the forms change frequently, even in the case of the most widely known and well-established terms. There is nothing extraordinary in this. We can make educated guesses about how certain words would behave when entering a certain language, based on the phonotactics of the parties involved and the conventions of transcription and transliteration of their respective writing systems, but whatever happens to the words afterwards is nigh impossible to predict. Let us consider one last example. While probably bizarre for people unused to the Japanese phonetic inventory, it makes

perfect sense that the English words 'eye' and 'catch' would be rendered as *ai* (アイ) and *kyacchi* (キャッチ) upon transcription. The fact that the resulting compound *eyecatch* means a bumper, however, signalling the beginning and end of a commercial break in traditional television broadcasting, is not something that naturally follows by any means, and can hardly be guessed by linguists either.

Such are the twists and turns taken by words caught up in the web of intercultural interactions, and we always see but the top of the iceberg here, with many alternatives of infinite variety lurking beneath, born then immediately discarded, going out of fashion and falling out of use, kept alive only in the memory of a few. We have not ventured to discover such relics of history—although it would certainly be an intriguing ride—and focused instead on the very basics. Further research is needed to fill in the gaps we have encountered so that more comprehensive statistics about the types and extent of borrowings can be made. It would also be worthwhile to examine whether their influx subsided over time compared to earlier phases when they were introduced *en masse*, or if they have been replaced by new terms coming from subsequent waves. The author of the present paper found many of the terms featured on the lists consulted for the study obsolete, often completely unheard of, despite their evident popularity a decade or two prior. Print sources, while essential for any serious academic discourse, tend to lag even further behind in this respect. We can but hope that the tendencies identified here are more lasting, and the insight provided by the present paper can contribute to broadening our understanding of the sociolinguistics of subcultural terminologies, and the case of Anglo-Japanese borrowings and reborrowings within the *anime-manga* communities in particular.

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Appendix

ACRO-NYM	ENGLISH	TRANSCRIPT	JAPANESE	0	1	*	2	CATE-GORY
	ahoge	ahoge	アホ毛	J+J	J		R	trope
	(TV) anime <ani-mation	(terebi) an-ime(¯shon)	(テレビ)アニメ(ーション)	(E+)E	K	C	G	form style
AMV	anime music video	anime myūjikku bideo	アニメミュージックビデオ	W+E+E	W	A	E	form
	aniparo <anime parody	aniparo	アニパロ	W+E	W	CB	G	form
	baka	baka	ばか・バカ・馬鹿	J	J		R	vocab
	bakunyū	bakunyū	爆乳	J+J	J		R	trope style
	bara	bara	薔薇	J	J		R	trope
	bentō	bentō	弁当	J	J		R	trope
	bishōjo	bishōjo	美少女	J+J	J		R	trope
	bishōnen・bishi(e)	bishōnen	美少年	J+J	J	C	R	trope
BL	boys' love	bōizu rabu・bīeru	ボーイズラブ・ビーエル	E+E	W	A	E	trope gen
[CB]	chibi (character) [child body]	chibi (kyara(kutā)	ちび(キャラ(クター)	J(+E)	J	(CA)	R	trope style
	circle	sākuru	サークル	E	K		E	act
	Comiket <com-ics market	komiketto	コミケット	E+E	W	CB	E	act cult
CM	<commercial message	komāsharu messē-ji・shīemu	コマーシャルメッセージ・シーエム	E+E	W	A	E	ind form
	cos(tume)play	kosuchūmu purē・kosupure	コスチュームプレー・コスプレ	E+E	W	CB	G	act
	cour(s)	kūru	クール	F	K		F	form
	dere(dere)	deredere	デレデレ	J	J	C	R	trope
	dōjin(shi)	dōjinshi	同人誌	J	J	C	R	form
H	ecchi	ecchi	エッチ	J	A	K	R	style gen
ED	ending (song)	endingu	エンディング	E(+E)	K	A	E	tech form
	ero <erotic	ero(chikku)	エロ(チック)	E	K	C	G	gen vocab
	eroge <erotic game	erochikku gēmu・eroge(¯mu)	エロチックゲーム・エロゲ(ーム)	E+E	W	CB	G	form
	eyecatch	aikyacchi	アイキャッチ	E+E	W		E	tech
	fan)dub	fan)dabu	ファン)ダブ	E	K		E	tech act

ACRO-NYM	ENGLISH	TRANSCRIPT	JAPANESE	0	1	*	2	CATE-GORY
	fan)service (cut)	sābisu (katto)・fansa	サービス(カット)・ファンサ	E+) E(+E	W	C	E	tech trope
	fan)sub	fansabu	ファンサブ	E	K		E	tech act
	fudanshi	fudanshi	腐男子	J+J	J		R	cult dem
	fujo(shi)	fujoshi	腐女子	J+J	J	C	R	cult dem
	futa(nari)	futanari	ふたなり	J	J	C	R	trope
	gakuran	gakuran	学ラン	J	J		R	trope
	gekiga	gekiga	劇画	J	J		R	form
	genga	genga	原画	J	J		R	tech form
	gensaku(sha)	gensaku(sha)	原作(者)	J	J		R	act
	guro <grotesque	guro(tesuku)	グロ(テスク)	E/F	K	C	G	style gen
	ko)gyaru/gal(ge) <gal game	ko)gyaru(gēmu)	子)ギャル(ゲーム)	J+)E(+E	E	K	G	style form
	harem	hāremu(mono)	ハーレム(もの)	F(+J)	K		E	trope
	hentai	hentai	変態・ヘンタイ	J	J		R	style gen
	hikikomori	hikikomori	引きこもり	J	J		R	cult
	idol	aidoru	アイドル	E	K		E	ind
	itai	itai	痛い・いたい	J	J		R	vocab
	josei	josei	女性	J	J		R	dem gen
	kaijū	kaijū	怪獣	J	J		R	trope gen
	kawaii	kawaii	かわいい	J	J		R	cult style
	kemono(mimi	kemono(mimi	獣(耳	J	J		R	trope
	key (visual/art/frame/animation)	kī (bijuaru/āto/furēmu/animēshon)	キー(ビジュアル・アート・フレーム・アニメーション)	E(+E)	K		E	tech
	kodomo(muke)	kodomo(muke)	子供(向け)	J	J	C	R	dem style
	kūdere	kūdere	クーデレ	E+J	M		M	trope
	lemon	remon	レモン	E	K		E	act style
LN	light novel	raito noberu・ranobe	ライトノベル・ラノベ	E+E	W	A	E	form
	loli(ta)	rori(¯ta)	ロリ(ータ)	F	K	C	F	trope style

ACRONYM	ENGLISH	TRANSCRIPT	JAPANESE	0	1	*	2	CATEGORY
	lolicon <Lolita complex	rorīta konpurekkusu・rorikon	ロリータコンプレックス・ロリコン	F+E	K	CB	G	cult dem
	magical girl	mahō shōjo	魔法少女	J+J	J	T	E	trope gen
	manga	manga	漫画	J	J		R	form style
	mangaka	mangaka	漫画家	J	J		R	ind
	manhua/manhwa/amerimanga /pseudomanga/world manga			F/E+J	M		M	form stlye ind
	mecha(nical)	meka(nikku)	メカ(ニック)	E	K	C	E	trope gen
	moe(´)	moe	萌え	J	J		R	style
	nani	nani	なに・何	J	J		R	vocab
	neko(mimi/musume/otoko)	neko(mimi/musume/otoko)	猫(耳・娘・男)	J(+J)	J		R	trope
	ojō(sama)	ojōsama	お嬢様	J	J	C	R	cult trope
	okama	okama	オカマ	J	J		R	cult trope
	omake	omake	お負け	J	J		R	form ind
	o)nii-san/chan・ani(ki/ue)	o)nii-san/chan・ani(ki/ue)	お)兄さん・ちゃん・兄貴・兄上	J	J		R	cult trope
OP	opening (song)	ōpuningu	オープニング	E(+E)	K	A	E	tech form
OVA/OAV/OAD	original (video) animation (disk/DVD)	orijinaru (bideo) animēshon (disuku)・ōvīē/ōēdī	オリジナル(ビデオ)アニメーション (ディスク)・オーヴィエー・オーエーディー	E+E+E	W	A	E	form
ONA	original net animation	webu anime	ウェブアニメ	E+E	W	TA	E	form
OST	original sound track	orijinaru saundo torakku	オリジナルサウンドトラック	E+E+E	W	A	E	form
	(w)otaku	(w)otaku	オタク・ヲタク	J	J		R	cult act
	otome(chikku) / (-kei/game)	otome(chikku) / (-kei/game)	乙女(チック)ゲーム)	J(+E)	J		R	cult act dem
	Q-version		Q版	E	F	T	E	trope style

ACRO-NYM	ENGLISH	TRANSCRIPT	JAPANESE	0	1	*	2	CATE-GORY
	raw			E	E		E	tech
	reverse (harem/ trap)	gyaku (hāremu/ torappu)	逆ハーレム・トラップ	J(+F/E)	J	T	E	trope
	scan(s)lation) <scan translation	sukyan(reishon)	スキャン(レイション)	E	K	C	E	tech act
	season	shīzun	シーズン	E	K		E	ind form
	seinen	seinen	青年	J	J		R	dem gen
[CV/ VA]	seiyū [character) voice (actor]	seiyū	声優	J	J	(A)	R	ind
	senpai/sempai	senpai	先輩	J	J		R	cult
	sensei	sensei	先生	J	J		R	cult
	shōjo	shōjo	少女	J	J		R	dem gen
	shōjo ai	shōjo ai	少女愛	J	J		R	trope gen
	shōnen	shōnen	少年	J	J		R	dem gen
	shōnen ai	shōnen ai	少年愛	J	J		R	trope gen
	shotacon	shōtarō konpurek-kusu・shotakon	正太郎コンプレックス・ショタコン	J+E	M	CB	M	cult dem
	sōsaku) june(´)	sōsaku) jun(e)	創作)ジュン・ジュネ	J+)J	J		R	act ind
	studio	sutajio	スタジオ	E	K		E	ind
	sugoi	sugoi	すごい・凄い	J	J		R	vocab
SD	super(-)de-formed	sūpādeforume	スーパーデフォルメ	E+F	W	TA	E	trope style
	tankōbon	tankōbon	単行本	j	J		R	format
	trap	torappu	トラップ	E	K		E	trope
	tsundere	tsundere	ツンデレ	J+J	J		R	trope
	urusai	urusai	うるさい・煩い	J	J		R	vocab
VKEI/ V系	v(isual(-)kei	vijuaru kei	ヴィジュアル系	E+J	M	A	M	style act
	waifu	waifu	ワイフ	E	K		G	trope
	weeaboo・weeb			E	E	C	E	act cult
	yandere	yandere	ヤンデレ	J+J	J		R	trope
	yaoi	yaoi	やおい・ヤオイ	J+J+J	A	J	R	gen
	yon-/4koma (manga)	yonkoma (manga)	4コマ（漫画）	J+J	J		R	form
	yuri	yuri	百合・ユリ	J	J		R	gen
ZR	zettai ryōiki	zettai ryōiki	絶対領域	J+J	J		R	trope

DERIVATION		0	1	*	2	Σ		CATEGORIES		
Japanese in Japanese	J	63	55	1		119		generic vocabulary	vocab	6
Japanese in *rōmaji*	R				55	55		cultural element / role	cult	15
wasei-eigo in *katakana*	W	2	14			16		activity / fandom	act	13
gairaigo in *katakana*	K		21	2		23		demographic category	dem	10
gairaigo in *rōmaji*	G				9	9		theme / genre	gen	16
English in original	E	43	3		30	76		character / story trope	trope	33
non-English foreign	F	8	1		2	11		visual quirk / style	style	16
mixed compound	M		4		4	8		format / medium	form	22
acronym / initialism	A		2	13		15		technical component	tech	10
clipping / abbreviation	C			22		22		industry / professional	ind	9
blend	B			6		6				
translation	T			5		5				
compounding	+	42				42				
Σ		116	100	49	100	365				

Tiktok Viral Trends: Language Phenomena in Digital Cultures

PANCO CRISTINA

Abstract. The present paper attempts to offer another perspective on TikTok as a tool for social interaction, observing a possible positive impact on the usage of language online, arguing that the novelty of the platform's interface allows users to reconfigure contexts of social connectivity. Providing as examples a number of viral TikTok videos from 2022 up until the first quarter of 2024, the present analysis focuses on the mechanisms involved in content creation online, where TikTok allows for new forms of internet slang to emerge, in which the repetitive nature of the algorithm promotes simultaneously creativity through mimicry and unique forms of personal expression. With the help of studies from the field of sociolinguistics, new media language and internet community-building theories, this paper disproves the reduction of the TikTok phenomenon to simple mimesis, propounding that the constant changes brought to specific online trends involve semiotic processes and context appropriation that add new layers of understanding communication and social relations online.

Key words: *TikTok, resemiotization, entextualization, content creation, community, internet language*

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic lockdown has been seen as the starting point of the rapid growth in the popularity of TikTok, as this was a period in which the social media platform became the main source of entertainment for a great number of people. Contrary to the 15 minutes of fame expected from the platform's performance due to the massive audience garnered overnight, TikTok is seen as one of the most used social media apps nowadays, becoming an integral part of internet practices. Although the platform also became synonymous with mindless scrolling, several positive aspects have to be acknowledged regarding TikTok's creation of alternative forms of communication, having a major influence on the "sociocultural norms/systems" (Zulli and Zulli 2022, 1885) that dominate our internet presence. Starting from changes observed in terms of the norms of content creation, the platform provides the perfect example of encouraging new ways of expression and challenging the norms of social interaction. The internet space allows for a subversion of the previously mentioned norms, as "obscurity and ambiguity are licensed", the clarity and cohesion of the message becomes secondary, and "amusement, laughter and creative enjoyment" become foregrounded (Deumert 2014, 28). This gives rise to the initial argument of this paper, stating that the behaviour of TikTok users has influenced the employment of language, appropriating new media vocabulary outside of its initial context and meaning.

A brief contextualization of TikTok is needed to understand the steps that allowed for these new online practices to emerge, starting with other similar popular platforms of the past decade. Through this comparison, it soon becomes clear that such forms of media content production and consumption are not entirely new but have been greatly improved through TikTok. Just like the algorithm itself relies on other platforms and a recirculation of pre-existent content, the main objective of this paper is to extend this relationship to the user behaviour as well, emphasizing the improvements brought by TikTok in this sense. From the premise that TikTok uses existing material in the production, consumption, and the algorithm's

function, it will become clear that the role of the platform extends past the preliminary conclusion which characterized the application as "yet another symptom of modern life marked by the logistics of short-lived consumption" (Schellewald 2021, 1438). What sets the platform apart, and what constitutes the focus of this research is the novelty of the feature "For You Page", which according to TikTok's own definition, is "a personal video stream based on your interests and your commitment" (TikTok n.d.). It provides each user with a curated experience based on the cues given by the algorithm. As this makes improbable the encounter of two identical "For You" pages, the present analysis will rely on a niched experience based on personal observations, with examples gathered between 2022 and the beginning of 2024, aiming for a discussion about the new dimensions of multimodal forms of expression. The subjective findings will be associated with similar posts in terms of audio or message, basing their popularity on the number of views and the number of posts made with the same content. New facets of this phenomenon related to the usage of language will reveal in this manner several mechanisms that come into play, underlining some potential ramifications of TikTok behaviour into semiotics, sociolinguistics, and social studies related to online connectivity.

Literature Review

The present paper relies on ideas brought forward by Leppänen et. al in Seargent and Tagg's *The Language of Social Media,* where the language mechanisms employed online are observed and explained, expanding on the importance of identity performance through the process of "entextualization and resemiotization" (Leppänen et. al 2014, 115). In this constant creation of content, the process of entextualization explains the recycling of pre-existent material that gets transformed into something new, relying on "decontextualization" and "recontextualization" to change and fit material into a new context (Leppänen et. al 2014, 115). This co-dependent relationship explains how entextualization focuses more on explanations about the re-usage of content, while resemiotization covers the "re-articulation

of meaning across modes and modalities" (Leppänen et. al 2014, 116), with an interest in how said content has been appropriated by different communities, promoting a cross-cultural view of the discourses. The processes have been developed from other perspectives regarding internet usage by Simon Lindgren as well, adding to this discussion the concept of "remediation" across social media in a process of "continuously absorb[ing] and repurpose[ing] other forms of media" (Lindgren 2017, 32), offering a similar view to the emergence of new content.

Along the same lines, Andreas Schellewald's article "Communicative Forms on TikTok: Perspectives from Digital Ethnography" draws attention to identity performance acts extracted from the analysis of preferences of users in terms of the type of content they consume. He also argues that TikTok content represents more than an ephemeral phenomenon, and that the focus of such an analysis should be more on the "embeddedness within the broader background of shared trends, memes, or platforms-specific languages" (Schellewald 2021, 1440). In this way, the emphasis is once more put on the cultural implications of TikTok, adding into the mix the "embodied and performative aspects of communication" of the TikTok videos, targeting a "shared sensibility" (Schellewald 2021, 1447) that plays into community building features. In his observations about the ethnography of TikTok, he distinguished between six different communicative types of interaction, namely the comedic, documentary, communal, explanatory, interactive and meta categories (Schellewald 2021, 1443-1450). This paper will make use of the comedic and communal aspects, with the additional note that they are not easy to separate from one another, as it will be observed that most of the comedic communicative forms also belong to the communal sphere, and the documentary and explanatory have the same purpose, that of informing. Moreover, the present study also brings into question the possibility of new emergent communicative forms in relation to the "meta" aspect of TikTok. Where the article mentions videos that "often start by talking about how TikTok's algorithms place content in your feed from users that have similar interests or who are in a similar life situation" (Schellewald 2021, 1450), there is a possible addition here regarding AI generated videos that either use other videos as starting point and are

enhanced with the help of AI, or make use of AI to generate a scenario and the content itself. In either case, each communicative form relies on the mechanisms of entextualization and resemiotization, in which the AI generated type of content is the most obvious articulation of the process.

As certain phenomena encountered on TikTok pertaining to language lead to new forms of internet slang, the present research extends the sociolinguistic properties of social slang into the online medium. Using Mattiello's analysis (2008), several features of slang in social groups have correspondents in the usage of internet slang, with the additional mention that although they both run on the same principles, internet slang has been adapted to a new, multimodal form of communication, which has not been covered in Mattiello's research. Although the medium in which internet slang is developed differs from Mattiello's initial research on English slang, some similarities must be considered to understand that the language mechanisms are not new, they are just transplanted onto a multimodal context rather than considering it a simple sociolinguistic analysis dealing with speaker-hearer interactions. In the case of TikTok, the interaction is mediated by the platform itself, but there are several aspects that remain unchanged. Mattiello mentions an important characteristic of slang in general, related to its users and their "wish to be understood and want other people to recognize, through it, their age, origin, lifestyle, and their manifest need to escape common neutral vocabulary" (Mattiello 2008, 214). Of course, this has become a standard in any internet community irrespective of which platform is used, having the purpose to "reduce the level of discourse to familiar or low speech" (Mattiello 2008, 216), and to create a sense of belonging to a certain subcommunity. What is more, the online phenomena can be explained through other qualities of slang, such as "time-restriction, ephemerality and localism" (Mattiello 2008, 220) peculiarities of language usage that help in understanding the process of what is called a "TikTok Viral Trend". Features of slang will be integrated into the present article to argue that community-building interactions depend on specific usage of language, be it face-to-face or online.

The Emergence of TikTok

Contextualizing the birth of TikTok makes it imperative to look back at what platforms were most used in the mid-2010's. Pew Research Centre published at the beginning of 2015 a statistic that placed Facebook, LinkedIn, Pinterest, and Twitter at the top. The applications mentioned predominantly used text-based and image-based content, and although they retained their popularity even a decade later, in a survey regarding "Most downloaded mobile apps worldwide 2023" (Ceci a 2024) shows that TikTok gained popularity and is the second most popular social network after Instagram, followed by Facebook. To better understand the shift to the type of content creation found today on TikTok, it is important to mention the precursors of the application, namely two other platforms that ran on the same principles. In this context, it is easy to see that TikTok is not the first to promote a recycling of pre-existing materials, running on principles of mimesis through lip-syncing actions. One such platform was *Musical.ly*, an earlier version of TikTok that focused specifically on ready-made sounds and melodies rather than promoting originality and content creation.

Another important precursor of TikTok is the now-deleted platform Vine, whose interface resembles TikTok's in many ways, and is considered to be "the first well-known mobile application to focus on short-form video" (Vandersmissen et. al 2014, 2). At its core, TikTok runs on the same principles that this platform did almost a decade ago, where clear parallels can be drawn, as "Vine enable[d] its users to create and distribute short looping videos of up to six seconds in length" and had other similar features that allowed them to "follow other users, re-broadcast videos to their followers by so-called revining, comment on videos and embed videos on websites" (Vandersmissen et. al 2014, 2). Although there were multiple developments brought to TikTok that have surpassed Vine, such as the expanded time limit and the distinctive marker of the "For You Page" algorithm, it can be argued that the majority of their features are similar if not the same. Furthermore, the primary purpose of the application has

been surpassed as well, as TikTok offers a diverse range of content that is more than simply "act(ed) out scenes from [their] favourite television show, movie, or cultural moment" (Zulli & Zulli 2022, 1873). This humorous aspect remained a constant between the two apps, but the perspective of producing easily relatable content ramified into notions of community building and has added a sense of belonging to certain categories of users, as the biggest percentage is found in the age range of 18 and 24 (Ceci b 2024). This age range makes it easier to understand the emphasis on identity construction and seeking acceptance in certain communities, as well as the enthusiasm to follow trends encountered on "For You" pages. As previously mentioned, this analysis discusses TikTok viral videos from the perspective of niche audiences, as it shall be observed how most of the videos discussed become viral starting from a very specific part of the platform, then are later adapted into other internet communities that fit individual interests.

There are numerous examples of trending Vines that have now become part of popular culture, with certain catchphrases entering offline vocabulary and being used in everyday speech and real-life interactions as well. As the platform has been deleted, people have reposted the popular videos on other platforms, showing the extent of their popularity years after the original posting, and one such example is Drew Gooden's vine that has been re-uploaded by a YouTube channel named @user-gf2kn8jp3k. His famous line "Road work ahead? Yeah, I sure hope it does" (2018) is still frequently quoted on TikTok, and thus integrated into another platform through its popularity, where users often refer to Vine. One such example is user Nathan Freihofer's TikTok in which he reenacts the original situation, garnering over two million views as of February 2024, being later paired with additional comments such as "It will never not be funny to me" (Freihofer 2023). Another similar post reveals Vine as shaping a generation, with user Jamie Reagan imagining a future situation where he still uses Gooden's line titled "Vine Generation in 15 Years" (@jamiereagan 2022) perfectly illustrating the quality of TikTok videos relevant to the present paper, namely how the process of "remediation" functions, based on the

idea of "continuously absorb(-ing) and repurpose(-ing) other forms of media" (Lindgren 2017, 32). This further presupposes the "nestedness" of media (Lindgren 2017, 32), where it can be argued that nothing about TikTok is inherently new, but has at its basis several concepts that have worked in the past in relation to other social media platforms, just like in turn, TikTok's video format has been further adapted to apps, Instagram and Facebook to a 'Reels' section, or YouTube to 'Shorts'running on the same principle.

TikTok and its community-building properties

Although the negative connotations commonly associated with TikTok videos cannot be completely ignored, following Schellewald's observations, the focus will be put on the "embeddedness in everyday and community life" (Schellewald 2021, 1438) that ultimately creates a sense of community on the platform. The examples found in this paper will try to sustain the idea of TikTok videos as a way of enriching a common experience online, where the catchphrases used by members of TikTok communities act as a binding element, helping in a way "by locating the self as part of common settings and circumstances" (Schellewald 2021, 1446). To a certain extent, the quality of the TikTok videos of being relatable can be explained in terms of resemiotization, as often they "communicate typical, funny, or absurd moments against the common backgrounds of life in school, college […] and familiar settings" (Schellewald 2021, 1446). Another facet that impacts community-building on TikTok is the "share" feature, allowing users to send their favourite content to friends and family. In this context, Vaterlaus and Winter conducted a qualitative analysis that reveals how users maintain and strengthen relationships through TikTok. The "relational 'closeness'" became accessible on the platform through "co-viewing or sharing videos" that not only had a humorous effect, but also became an "opportunity for 'connection' over shared interests" (Vaterlaus and Winter 2021, 9), and the diverse content that targets very specific topics and niched

interests makes it possible to actively participate in several communities without them overlapping.

Moreover, if we look at the demographic of TikTok users, approximately 38% belong to the 18 to 24 age range, with the majority identifying as part of the GenZ generation (Ceci b 2024). Arguably, this data creates an encompassing view of youth culture and language online, revealing a generation that has "its own multilayered communication mode" (Stahl & Literat 2022, 10) that transcends TikTok and creates an interconnected network of references across several social media platforms. The aforementioned case of Vine is one such example, with the original video being re-uploaded to YouTube, then slowly repurposed on TikTok or Instagram 'reels'. Moreover, as slang is usually attributed to this age category, it is natural to extend the parallel to online context, as GenZ language has already been thoroughly studied in the past years. However, the forms of community produced by the platform change the concept of slang seen as a form of "secrecy and privacy" (Mattiello 2008, 217) in negative terms, as TikTok references are made with the intention of showing the internet community the ability to re-use the ready-made content as part of one's identity creation process. From this point of view, the TikTok user can be explained in Papacharissi's understanding of a "networked self" which can transcend "collapsed and multiplied audiences" making possible an understanding of place as something reflexive and flexible at the same time (Papacharissi 2011, 317).

Considering this reliance on easily relatable catchphrases that can be easily adapted to personal experiences, some characteristics of slang can be connected to language use on TikTok. Because of this, the viral sound effects found on TikTok can be considered internet "language" or more precisely internet vernacular, adding a multimodal perspective to online slang. As mentioned before, this perspective will distance itself from the original understanding of slang seen as a form of anti-language and associated with changes at the levels of morphology, grammar, or semantics. The usage of internet slang on TikTok relies more on the previously mentioned remediation and recontextualization of content, where changes

at the semantic level are predominant. This view of internet slang aligns with TikTok being used to promote a sense of "collective expression and belonging" (Stahl & Literat 2022, 17), where a majority of users identify with a certain age group or with one specific category related to gender, sexual orientation, culture, religion or a particular common interest. Furthermore, this can be associated with the inherent repurposing of ready-made sounds as a new method of communication, a connection in which "sound is perceived, produced, and performed" as a "form of identification and socialization" (Papenburg & Schulze 2016, 46). How users employ language in this context depends on certain background information that makes available the specific meaning given to a word or phrase that otherwise could be misunderstood or not understood at all. One example is the concept of "beige flag" popularized by user @itscaito, who has coined the term in a video captioned "beige is the new red and in other news dating apps are a wasteland" (@itscaito 2022) referring to the boring traits of some individuals. From the caption one understands that the concept is not entirely original, but has been inspired by another piece of internet vernacular, namely that of a "red flag" in someone's personality, defining a bad character trait. In this layering of concepts, it is easy to see how without knowing the meaning of the original context, it would be impossible to make sense of the second term, requiring users to be constantly up to date with every trend on TikTok to understand later developments in online language. In other instances, the original intended meaning can be subverted and interpreted differently by anyone, adding to the audio part of the TikTok video their own niche-interests. The audio created by Max Fosh in 2022 fits this description, with part of his interview taken out of context by fellow TikTokers and used as resemiotization on his "I do not know my fruit" video (@maxfosh 2022). The original context makes it clear that Fosh refers to him mistaking grapefruit for pomegranate, constructing indirectly the perfect base for TikTok content where individuals misinterpret something. For instance, model Ashley Graham's video references her career and the societal beauty standards using Fosh's audio (@theashleygraham 2022). In another TikTok, user Joey Dardano reinterprets the original audio

into the context of seasonal depression and being "sunny and warm for the first time in 3 months" (@joeydardano 2022), proving that the versatility and creativity of sounds can also rely on subversive recontextualization in which the intended meaning does not matter.

Another change brought forth by TikTok in terms of language returns to previous arguments about mediated communication and the multimodal aspect of social media. In this relation, text-based and image-based applications such as Facebook, Instagram, and X (formerly known as Twitter), having raised questions of a "disembodied" interaction online, allowed interactions to be recognized only through the "style and content" that reveals parts of the user's identity (Lindgren 2018, 87). To a certain extent, TikTok has changed the understanding of multimodality once video elements were included into interactions but remains at the same time an "asynchronous" activity (Lindgren 2018, 91). While this still does not replace entirely face-to-face human interaction, the identity of the content creator reveals more than any other previously mediated interactions. However, the style and content mentioned before also change with the creative treatment of the entextualization and resemiotization processes.

This can be easily observed on TikTok through one preferred way of identity construction which includes videos revealing personal information about the creator. A statistic analysing the "Most popular content categories on TikTok worldwide as of July 2020, by number of hashtag views" reveals that the first five themes in terms of content are "Entertainment", "Dance", "Pranks", "Fitness", and "Home reno/DYI" (Ceci 2022) where home tours, explaining a daily routine, or participating in challenges with friends and family seem to be the preferred way of constructing an online identity. The community building aspect of TikTok thrives in this environment, as some content creators share their daily lives online, with added details that pass beyond a normal interaction in a face-to-face setting. The "hyperpersonal interaction" (Walther qtd. in Lindgren 2018, 100) has become a norm in some TikTok communities, the behaviour best exemplified by influencers like Charlie D'Amelio, who has built an entire career out of dance videos and offering glimpses into her life to her audience. Online

fame has changed valences as well, because just like content consumption, content production involves a constant actualization of trends and interests the users hold at any one time. In this context, the algorithm does not "accommodate esoteric subcultures and communities who can find their footing and niche regardless", but asks people to "actively seek out, learn, participate in, and engage" (Abidin 2021, 80). This provides an explanation as to why many TikTok trends cannot be traced back to their original creators, as TikTok does not rely on the popularity of a content creator in order to consider something to be popular, but rather 'makes' an appeal to the public opinion, to find out what users might have interesting to say, and to then re-use it in a way that will "accumulate 'engagements'" (Abidin 2021, 80). For instance, as of February 2024, the most recent trending audio comes from an episode of "Glee" that aired more than a decade ago. The resurfacing of the musical part with the lyrics "All that work and what did it get me, why did I do it" (Glee 2010, 33:46-33:54) resonated with the TikTok community as it can be used to express regret over something. With overlayed text explaining the particular instance, the audio bears no relevance to its original source. For instance, user @ray_kenley used the audio with an overlayed text reading "When u actually paid attention this time and u end up w the same grade:" (19 February 2024) making no reference to the Glee character or what he might have meant by these words, but changes the meaning to convey disappointment over a personal problem, gaining 10 million views the last time checked, 25 February 2024.

This view circles back to the already mentioned characteristics of slang that can be found in users' behaviour on TikTok, a relation in which viral trends, be it in terms of music, dances, actions, or phrases, appear overnight and disappear quickly, usually within a few weeks. One such example is the autotuned version of British filmmaker Louis Theroux's interview made by duo "Duke & Jones" (March 16, 2022), which has gained massive popularity and has turned swiftly into a dance trend, reaching number one on the "Itunes Top 100" in the United States in May 2022 (Top Charts 2022). This started as a simple question about his past, to which Theroux answered by explaining to his interview host how he used to perform by

reciting a few lines from a rap song. Making fun of the lyrics, TikTok users took it a step further, adding music to Theroux's words, remixing it countless times, reaching thousands of users who joined in the trend through a choreographed dance, including several celebrities or online personalities. One such example is the joint account of actresses Lili Reinhart, Camila Mendes and Madelaine Petsch that go by the username "@blondebrunetteredhead" whose interpretation of the original (TikTok 2022) dance moves have been later adapted by others. Although the trend started as a joke to the nonsensical lyrics recited by Theroux, this is one example of TikTok helping people to become popular, bringing together multiple TikTok communities that wanted to express their own impression of the original context. This ultimately allows for an interpretation of TikTok identity construction through a "ludic state of mind" (de Mul qtd. in Deumert 2014, 24) where the entertainment value of the video manages to create a networked experience with "multiple possibilities of being" (Deumert 2014, 25) and a layered experience that is unique.

Constant engagement, "girl dinner", and relatability

The properties of slang proposed by Mattiello can also be applied to some mechanisms of TikTok videos. While Matiello's slang analysis clearly delineates the "speaker and hearer oriented" (2008, 214) properties, the usage of internet slang becomes a mediated practice, as the speaker and listener do not interact directly. One possible approximation in the online sphere would be to view the "user-led content creation" (Bruns 2013, 4) as mediating the linguistic practices of the creator of the content and the viewer who interacts with the original post. As Bruns' understanding of content creation relies on the "passing along of materials from user to user" (6), it would not be far-fetched to link it with the constant remediation of material found on TikTok, which can also be used outside of the platform and in other contexts. TikTok has in this manner "mimesis as the *basis* of sociality on the site" (Zulli & Zulli 2022, 5) relying on the creation of

content after somebody else's already posted video, be it a dance sequence or a following-along to an already existing sound to which one can lip sync. However, this element has developed and can no longer be considered a simple copy of another user's content, because it requires more knowledge than of the TikTok sound itself. Starting from this observation, TikTok stands apart from other platforms that create content because the "sounds are what ground the mimetic expression" (Matamoros-Fernández 2023, 2), but then it all ramifies into further manifestations of creativity. In this process involving the entextualization and resemiotization of content, the user is required to be "culturally and politically *in the know*" (Zulli & Zulli 2022, 6), relying on the extensive knowledge of different contexts that make possible the understanding of the new content. In other words, one must actively engage in communities, as the constant resemiotization of content constantly changes the dynamics of a particular TikTok group.

Many of the current trending videos found on TikTok depend on this background knowledge to understand the joke, in which the process of "nestedness" encourages a "multilayered communication mode" that, through humor, reveals a common "way of moving through the world" (Stahl & Literat 2022, 10). One such example is the TikTok that went viral in May 2023 and turned into internet slang "girl dinner". The initial trend started from user Olivia Maher (@liviemaher) who took to the platform her dinner resembling that of a "medieval peasant" (12 May 2023), essentially the contents of a charcuterie board, or what could be considered a low-effort meal. As many other women felt like they had experienced something similar, they also began to share their meals online, and the term started to be used frequently for every meal that takes little to no time to prepare, typical for a girl or a woman. Another layer was brought to the trend by users such as @karmapilled (6 July 2023), who added a melody to the concept, which immediately took over the entire platform. What is more, the concept underwent several stages in which new meaning was added to the original one, with thousands of girls adopting @karmapilled's audio to create their own version of a "girl dinner". With an additional process of remediation, the opposing concept, "boy dinner" was created. This in

turn underwent a second process of entextualization and resemiotization leading to the creation of the "girl math" trend. In principle, "girl math" focuses on the same gender-based joke that explains the faulty logic of women when it comes to finances and shopping that started from the user @samjamessssss that delved into the so-called woman logic regarding money. Giving examples such as "if you pay for trips in advance, by the time you go on the trip it's free" or thinking of clothes prices in terms of how many times the items will be worn and reasoning that if you buy a "50 dollars T-Shirt and you wear that 50 times, it's only a dollar per use" (@samjamessssss 5 August 2023) thus making it almost free. This has also been in turn recontextualized for the term "boy math", where the entire sequence of trend creation encapsulates the principles that make TikTok videos viral: it targets a certain community or audience, in this case focusing on gender differences, develops a scenario that is relatable to a large number of people - low-effort food and money-spending habits, and can be easily recreated by anyone through mimicry or by adding personal touches that fit best the content found on one's account. What is at play here is the capability of users to shift between different modes of existence, to "adopt shifting stylistic, epistemic and affective stances, drawing on their semiotic repertoires to recontextualize meanings" (Darvin 2022, 3), which circles back to TikTok's ability to continuously create new content based on the ones already existing.

Furthermore, what can be already observed from the previous examples and by looking at one of the roles of slang as creating "humor and playfulness" (Mattiello 2008, 223), is a shift in terms of how connections between individuals are created online, which can be associated with the comedic communicative function mentioned by Schellewald (20210. Just as slang makes use of "subtle play of metaphorical extensions" and of presuppositions of the "hearer's knowledge of the circumstances to identify the actual meanings implied" (Mattiello 2008, 223), TikTok sounds rely completely on the audience's previous encounter with that specific sound. As the primary focus of TikTok is to entertain, the "memefication' of daily life" represents the type of content promoted, allowing users to express

"the self and one's current mood through already existing formats and scripts" (Schellewald 2021, 1446). This happened with several scenes from the British mockumentary *Cunk on Earth* that were personalized using the TikTok platform. The humorous script allows for the audience and TikTok users to appropriate the lines in unconventional ways, associating them with personal experiences to create new content. One such example is the segment: "It's hard to believe I'm walking through the ruins of the first ever city. Because I'm not. That's in Iraq, which is miles away" (Cunk on Earth 2022, 6:50-6:57). In a clever example of not meeting created expectations, the sequence was soon turned into a viral audio, as it can be adapted to almost any situation by content creators. One user has decided to add to the sound a modified version of the original text, alongside a visual element that reads "It's hard to believe I'm studying for my finals. Because I'm not. I'm just on my phone all day" (@bpdal 7 May 2023). Just as in previous cases, the easily adaptable content produces contexts that are relatable to the TikTok community, where the text overlay makes it easier to produce a scenario that can be enjoyed by a vast majority of users. Consequently, the high relatability allows users to modify the meaning to fit their own interests, disproving the theory that the behaviour encountered on TikTok is strictly mimetic, where the parallel with the sociolinguistic traits of language variation and usage can be entertained.

Conclusions

At the basis of the TikTok algorithm stands a need to form communities and reach diverse interests that could potentially form other subcommunities on the platform. From this perspective, one can look at TikTok in a positive light, as the processes of becoming viral and affording interaction with other users promote language usage in new and original ways, bearing some similarities to how slang words are adapted by a community in order to build connections and a sense of belonging. Furthermore, it has been observed that TikTok as a platform also shifts the focus from a strictly

mimetic behaviour, as in the case of previous apps like Vine and *Musical.ly*, a development that allows users to show personalized takes upon trends and current events, thus being part of the greater community-building interactions as well as showcasing their individuality and critical thinking skills. In terms of algorithmic trends, the focus was on the question of who exactly decides what becomes popular and what constitutes a viral trend, where another distinction from other social media platforms can be signalled. The fact that users and their engagement can elevate a video to viral status shifts the focus away from the individual to the content itself, a relation in which, one might argue, language usage is more important than the speaker.

Moreover, there are several processes that are inevitably adapted to the online medium, which is the case of language mechanisms that come into play in terms of creating new understandings of existing material, where the process of entextualization, remediation, and resemiotization explains other mechanisms that help a TikTok video become popular. Like any variety, online slang presupposes ideas of belonging to a certain niche, using language in new and creative ways to show adherence to said group. In a like manner, TikTok uses the processes of remediation to recycle content already found online and adapt it to current interests, requiring several stages of reinterpretation in which the original meaning is taken out of its context and is appropriated to fit the new intended purpose. This paper discussed several examples that thoroughly explain the building of meaning, where the process can be visualised as a process of "nestedness" (Lindgren 2017, 32), as new layers of meaning are added to existing content in order to create a personalized experience. The case of the "girl dinner" trend exemplifies best this quality of TikTok to build new meanings upon pre-existing ones, further ramified into a continuous process of remediation with later additions of trends such as "boy dinner" or "girl math" type of content. On the other hand, the versatility of TikTok and the creativity of the users allows for endless reinterpretations that distance themselves from the original understanding. Fosh's "I don't know my fruits" or the fragment taken from *Cunk on Earth* rely on this mechanism, where it has

been argued that mimicry is not the only possible interpretation, as the users imaginatively pair the original audio with an overlay of text that changes the context and gives a personal touch to the content.

This new perspective ultimately leads to a reconsideration of TikTok viral videos as "cultural artifacts" (Schellewald 2021, 1439), as these trends are not as fleeting as they appear to be. The ephemerality encountered in social slang is present in the online language as well, but there are cases in which the content continues to be subverted and reinterpreted to fit another context, receiving another layer of meaning. Such instances have been explored through Duke & Jones's remix and the resurfaced "Glee" audio bit, where of old cultural content is taken up by TikTok creators and given a new layer of understanding. In consequence, the examples presented in this paper that create the new meaning can be viewed as more than simple visual memes, explanatory videos, or artistic manifestations. They can be seen as changing the parameters of current-day social and cultural dimensions, where TikTok allows users to access new forms of online connectivity and create a network of interactions whose versatility cannot be replicated in face-to-face contexts.

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Online Fandom Dynamics: A Comparative Analysis of YouTube and TikTok Communities

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Abstract. This comparative analysis explores the distinct dynamics of online fan communities on YouTube and TikTok, shedding light on their unique characteristics. On YouTube, emotional bonds between creators and fans create virtual families. The comments section becomes a hub for fan interactions, shaping shared norms and values. Fan-generated content, such as compilation videos and fan-made music, deepens these connections. In contrast, TikTok thrives on rapidly evolving trends and user interactions. The platform is less creator-centric, and its algorithm customises content for users. TikTok's affordances foster creativity and engagement, encouraging users to reinterpret trends and blur the lines between creators and fans. This analysis reveals the evolving landscape of online fandoms, highlighting their essence: creating a sense of belonging among like-minded individuals.

Key Words: *YouTube, TikTok, online fandom, virtual communities, user-generated content, social media*

Introduction

The internet has become a space where people can follow numerous content creators to suit their interests, whether gaming, makeup, or cooking. In online spaces, users are defined by the type of content they consume, as well as the particular vloggers or influencers they follow. What is more, affordances such as the possibility of posting comments allow for direct interactions between internet users, and the ability to post provides a creative outlet, which increases involvement and interest. This leads to the formation of communities based on shared passions and ideas. The phenomenon can be observed across most, if not all social platforms, including YouTube and TikTok, two video-sharing apps. How these platforms are constructed influences user experience and behaviour, which determines the way in which communities emerge and develop.

This article seeks to analyse the intricate relationship between the design of online platforms, such as YouTube and TikTok, and their profound influence on user experience and behaviour. By analysing the way users engage with content creators, define themselves by their content preferences, and interact with one another, this article will look at the formation of content creator fandoms whose main platforms are YouTube and TikTok respectively. In order to understand fandom-specific elements and to identify them within the platforms mentioned above, this article will utilise the elements identified by Malcolm Parks as part of the makeup of online communities: "shared rituals, social regulation", "identification, a sense of belonging and attachment" and "self-awareness of being a community," (2010, 108) as they are the most relevant and easily-identifiable within the context of the selected platforms.

The first part of the study explores YouTube, a site where creators forge deep emotional bonds with their fans, creating a sense of belonging within their communities. Fan comments and user-generated content play important roles in the shaping of these communities, allowing fans to actively participate and connect with each other and offering clues toward common values and norms. The second part of the paper analyses

TikTok, a social networking platform where rapidly evolving trends and user interactions redefine fan experience. While TikTok communities are primarily content-oriented, features like duets and stitches enable users to engage creatively. This section also examines how TikTokers transitioning to vlog-style content draws fans into more creator-centred communities.

1. YouTube Fan Communities

YouTube is a video-sharing platform that offers countless options for entertainment to suit the particular interests of its users. As content tends to be divided based on categories, viewers can identify with communities that form around specific topics, such as Minecraft, makeup tutorials, or lifestyle vlogs. Within each community, specific creators become well-known and gain fan bases of their own. Popular YouTubers have channels where they talk about their respective subjects, try different challenges, and film collaboration videos with other creators. Because of this, fans tend to watch them for prolonged periods and can even become emotionally attached to these creators, making them prone to form dedicated fan communities (Vancottem 2021, 12). The relationship formed between creators and fans represents the main appeal of YouTube communities, as they behave like pseudo-families, which generates a feeling of belonging between members and leads to active participation in the creation of shared norms and values (Rotman, Goldbeck and Preece 2009, 43).

The examples in this section have been chosen from the fandom of British YouTubers Dan Howell and Phil Lester, who have 6.15 million and 3.9 million subscribers, respectively. The reason they were both selected is that, within the YouTube community, they are seen as a unit. They often produce videos together, either on their individual channels or on their shared channel, DanAndPhilGAMES, and their fan bases seem to overlap. Active since the ’00s, their first video together was posted in 2009. As such, their fandom has been developing into a community for the past 14 years.

1.1. Comments Sections

The overall structure of YouTube as a platform hasn't changed much since its conception in 2005 and offers relatively few features that encourage active participation within fan communities. The primary way for users to actively participate in a YouTuber's fandom is by leaving a comment under a video. As such, the comments section can be a great indicator of solidarity between users, shared beliefs and commonly understood norms, which point in the direction of a well-defined community. Fans have the ability to directly communicate with their favourite creators, as well as other fans, increasing emotional involvement and feelings of belonging. Furthermore, since commenters can freely express their thoughts, their comments can showcase fandom-specific language and values.

In 2017, Dewi and Simanjuntak conducted a study to determine the relevance of comments in indicating the presence of a strongly outlined community. To do so, they analysed 3,768 comments from the video titled "The Best of Dan and Phil on Crack," a compilation of funny moments of Dan and Phil. What they found out is that 64.25% of commenters have a username that references Dan and Phil in some capacity, while 73.2% used a photo of Dan and/or Phil as their profile picture. This indicates that a large portion of the commenters considered being part of the fandom to be an important feature of their online identity. Additionally, the comment section contains evidence of an agreement between members, by using the terms 'Phan' and 'Phandom.' The former represents a term used to refer to both Dan and Phil, by combining their names, while the latter is the official fandom name chosen by fans. As Herring points out: "culture is indexed through the use of group-specific abbreviations, jargon, and language routines" (2004, 356). As such, the presence of words particular to a certain group, which the members use actively, points in the direction of mutual understanding and solidarity within a community.

The comments section also represents the primary way in which fans can interact with each other on the platform, seeking to bond and connect with others belonging to the same community (Dezuanni 2020, 26). This section will analyse the comments on a recent video posted by Dan

and Phil on the channel DanAndPhilGAMES. The video titled "Saying Goodbye Forever" is an announcement of the creators' continuation to post after a 4-year hiatus, and currently has 1.2 million views and 17.6 thousand comments. What makes this comment section stand out is that most commenters seem to communicate with one another, instead of exclusively addressing Dan and Phil. Generally, the comments contain fans' history of watching Dan and Phil videos and the impact they have had on their lives, prompting others to reminisce along. As Jenkins points out: "The difference between watching a [television] series and becoming a fan lies in the intensity of their emotional and intellectual involvement" (1992, 56). What these comments reveal is the commenters' attachment to the fandom and the long-term feelings of enthusiasm that come with such a connection. The top comments have thousands of likes and entire threads of replies, which strengthen the sense of community and confirm solidarity between members, due to their shared experience.

A sense of mutual history is furthered by the repeated mention in the comments of Dil Howlter, a video game character created by Dan and Phil in 2014 and referenced in the aforementioned video. Dil has appeared repeatedly in videos and has become easily recognizable among fans. He is now an element that can be likened to what Sullivan calls "trivia details", features which "are not necessary for casual audiences to obtain entertainment from popular media", however, "the utilization and trading of these extensive volumes of knowledge about popular texts are key sources of fan pleasure" (2012, 198). The presence of such aspects showcases the importance of comments in the identification and portrayal of fan communities on YouTube, by highlighting defining features of a specific fandom.

1.2. User-generated Content

Another way users can actively participate in the community of their preferred YouTubers is by creating content of their own. Users are more likely to simply watch rather than upload their own videos (Burgess and Green 2018, 58). However, a small number of users still find enjoyment in uploading videos, and this includes fans. Two of the most popular kinds

of fan-generated videos are compilation-style videos and fan-made music videos, commonly shortened to FMV. Even if it is not the dominant mode of fan expression on YouTube, “the process of producing content is actually the most effective interaction in stimulating creativities and creating a sense of community” (Yang 2020, 53), as it helps users express their individuality and keeps them engaged with the community.

Compilations contain short clips selected and put together into one longer video. They usually follow a theme, such as funny moments or creators being clumsy, and are made to be shared and watched by fans as a form of appreciation. These types of videos can bring together like-minded individuals and can serve as starting points for conversation and exchange of opinions between members of a community. For example, within the Dan and Phil community, the most viewed compilation is titled “Dan playing piano / / ft phil”, with over 1.3 million views. At the time of writing this paper, the video had 62 thousand likes and over 8.3 thousand comments. Particularly the latter highlights the importance and benefits of communication within an online community. The comments primarily consist of people sharing their particular favourite moment in the video, praising Dan’s piano skills, replying to other commenters, and thus, engaging in conversation. This is important in maintaining a community, as Lindgren points out: “A general motivation for joining and staying in online communities is fulfilment of the basic social need of feeling part of a group, being gratified by the sense of emotional and cognitive connection” (2021, 109). Essentially, interpersonal activity between users, whether through content creation or direct communication, maintains a high level of satisfaction or encourages further activity, which keeps communities alive.

The second type of user-created content is the FMV (see above). In the context of FMVs created with YouTubers in mind, they feature clips taken from their uploaded videos, with a song replacing the original audio. The clips can be selected to fit the song’s mood, with a theme in mind, or even be arranged to tell a story. The most viewed Dan and Phil FMV is titled “Dan and Phil - Steal My Boy”, with 639 thousand views. It is meant to be a nostalgic and emotional timeline of Dan and Phil’s friendship while also

hinting at the creator shipping[1] Dan and Phil. It uses Lilian MacDonald's "Steal My Boy", a cover of One Direction's famous song "Steal My Girl", as background music. What these videos showcase is the process of remediation, a characteristic of digital media, which "continuously absorb and repurpose other forms of media" (Lindgren 2021, 32). The ability to take already existing elements and transform them gives users creative freedom, which, in turn, increases engagement, both with the source materials and between fans. In the case of the given example, the choice of theme and the message of the songs can be seen as an instrument that allows the creator to communicate how they view the relationship between Dan and Phil. The 2.7 thousand comments contain discussion threads of people praising the creator and confirming their agreement of "the shipping of Dan and Phil", something which can be considered a shared value within the fandom.

1.3. Presence on Other Platforms

One of the defining features of any fandom is the relationship between the creators and the fans. YouTube functions in a manner similar to traditional television, in the sense that users can choose to watch "episodes" of their favourite creators. The difference lies in how the actual content is perceived. While a TV series is clearly scripted, most vlogs or gameplays feel homemade and genuine, which contributes to the feeling of authenticity: "The work of 'being authentic' on YouTube requires micro-celebrities to be more accessible to their fans than a traditional Hollywood star has been in the past" (Dezuanni 2020, 28). While an actor is out of reach for most fans, a YouTuber is just a comment away, telling us about their day from their living room, which creates a sense of bonding and emotional connection, as if watching a friend (Vancottem 2021, 12). The parasocial relationships that form within a YouTube fandom increase the involvement of fans within the community. This, combined with the limited means of participation imposed by the platform itself prompts fans to gather on other platforms.

1. The verb ‚to ship' is used according to the following definition: „to wishfully regard (specific people or fictional characters) as being or having the potential to become romantically involved with one another"(Merriam Webster).

Even though a fandom may primarily exist on YouTube, its extensions thrive on sites such as Facebook, Tumblr, or Twitter.

Dan and Phil's fandom is present across all major social media platforms and can be identified through the search of keywords and the use of hashtags. Hashtags are essential in the construction of fandom, as they create visibility and "may indicate not only content but also audience, intent, and self-identity" (Dame 2016, 23). On Instagram, for example, #danandphil contains 3.8 million posts, #phan 5.5 million, and #phandom 2.7 million. This shows agreement among fans and a place for them to post photos and videos of Dan and Phil. The same hashtags exist on Tumblr: #dan and phil have 139 thousand followers, #phan 67 thousand, and #phandom 12 thousand. As Tumblr allows for greater variety in the type of content uploaded, the posts under "Phandom" further exemplify the tendency towards what Lindgren defines as remediation. The posts contain fragments and stills from Dan and Phil's videos, repurposed as gifs, memes and edits. These sites offer greater flexibility for fans to interact with one another and use their creativity, which furthers involvement. Another feature of Tumblr is the possibility of posting text messages, which allows users to communicate their opinions, react to Phan content, and share funny thoughts with fellow fans.

A similar practice is the production of works on fanfiction site Archive of Our Own (abbreviated to AO3). Works of fanfiction can offer glimpses into the shared norms and values of a fandom. Under the Phandom category (which contains 17.6 thousand works), 16.5 thousand works share the tag Dan/Phil, which indicates that approximately 93.75% of those who wrote fanfiction also wish for Dan and Phil to be in a romantic relationship or, at least, agree with the idea. Additionally, the character tags show prominent elements within the fandom. The top three characters in the Phandom category, not including Dan and Phil, are YouTubers PJ Liguori (who appears in 1.500 works), Chris Kendall, and Louise Pentland (who each appear in 1000 works). Although they are not directly part of the Phandom, all three are people with whom fans are familiar and thus represent knowledge shared by fans. As such, creating and reading posts

on Tumblr or fanfiction posted on AO3, for example, represent not only fan interactions but also exchanges of information. As Steenkamp states: "The domain of knowledge within fandoms is very often the object of the fandom and the ethos of the fandom itself. Through their interactions with other fans within their community, individuals deepen their knowledge about that fandom and the object of the fandom" (2018, 18). As a result, fans feel a more profound connection to the community and its members, encouraging them to participate further and engage.

2. TikTok Fan Communities

The idea of community on TikTok is complex, as user interactions and videos uploaded continue to change, aided by the perpetual evolution of the app. In its origins, TikTok began as a platform where users would post dance covers under already existing sounds and do various challenges (Feldkamp 2021, 75). Users consume a large number of videos in a short amount of time, primarily from their For You Pages (henceforth abbreviated to *FYP*). The *FYP* is a personalised page especially curated for each user, showing a similar type of content to what they usually interact with. This results in users who are more likely to see more of a specific trend, and less of the varied content, of one creator. Because of this, most "traditional" communities on TikTok are just as defined by the type of content they consume, as they are by the specific creators on their *FYP*.

2.1. Participatory Culture

As a platform, TikTok is fully equipped with different options that allow users to interact with their preferred content; as Yuxin Yang points out: "TikTok valuing interaction is evident in its design of interface, where likes, comments, direct texts and shared buttons were built" (2020, 52). These features are easily accessible and resemble those offered by YouTube. In addition, the app offers unique elements which allow users to respond to TikToks, by using an audio, duetting and stitching other videos with the

press of a button. Alex Windheim explains the difference between duets and stitches: “Duets play side by side (or picture-in-picture) at the same time; stitches are shown in sequence, first the original clip, then your recording. [...] Duets are great for real-time reactions and collaborations. Stitches are better for elaborating on a topic or continuing a discussion” (2022). The two options further encourage communication and creative involvement beyond what is possible in comments.

TikTok encourages consuming a large number of clips presented on *FYP*, which is specially curated by an algorithm based on the user’s preferred subjects, rather than watching only a particular creator’s videos. Because of this, user communities are less creator-oriented, and more content- and trend-oriented than those on YouTube, *FYP* bringing users together through a sense of “algorithmic closeness” (Krutrök 2021, 4). Nevertheless, it is the more prominent creators that make specific trends popular and to which users look for inspiration and entertainment. Once top TikTokers have established trends, it is up to users to interpret and transform them. This creative user involvement encourages users to interact with creators, and become creators in their own right: “Following their favorite TikTok stars, users not just simply watch their content, but create similar contents that are inspired by theirs” (Yang 2020, 55). It is this participatory nature that makes the TikTok app popular among its fans. What matters most in the formation of a TikTok community is the creativity of the users, which takes trends or audios and makes them their own. While the creator of a trend is able to set the basic structure of videos, elements such as gestures or music selection, participants can then transform them by selecting different texts, backgrounds, or outfits according to their own style (Yang 2020, 55).

2.2. Content Creation

To exemplify this phenomenon, a trend that was at its peak in 2022 has been selected: the British chav makeup tutorial, which is the result of two other trends. The first is an audio made famous by American TikToker Bella Poarch, which features the chorus of the song “M to the B” by singer Millie B. The audio is now used in 3.4 million videos, mostly of people

mouthing along to the lyrics. The second one is the "You don't even look British". This trend perfectly encapsulates users' creativity, this time manifested through remediation. The audio used in this trend is a combination of another audio taken from a clip initially posted by user @evyncollins, continued with the song "Quién Piensa En Ti" covered by Mexican band El Trono De México. The audio features a dialogue, the first person stating, "But you don't look gay", to which a second person responds with "Oh, I'm sorry, let me just..".., followed by a comedic montage of that person changing their clothes. The whole trend pokes fun at the ridiculousness of stereotypes and how they affect the perception of other people. The British version of the clip features creators prompted by the statement "But you don't even look British" to put on the stereotypical "chav costume". For women, this means wearing heavy makeup and chewing gum, as exemplified by @therealoverloadcomedy), while men put on puffer jackets and point knives at the viewer exaggeratedly, for example, @_adammc2 (Di Martino 2022, 38).

The two trends mentioned above were combined, resulting in users doing their makeup in the British chav style while mouthing the lyrics of "M to the B". The audio under which most of these are posted has sparked the creation of 25.000 videos up until now, and the most popular related TikTok currently has 22.5 million views (posted by @dominiqueallison). What is notable about this trend is not only the creativity behind it (each post presenting a unique twist), but the comments section as well. The comments indicate the vast amount of people who seem to enjoy this type of content by probably relating to what is shown or agreeing on the ridiculous nature of stereotypes.

2.3. The YouTubification of TikTok

There is an observable change in the type of content posted on TikTok. While most videos still feature dancing and lip-syncing, more and more vlog-style videos are being posted, the transition eased by constant updates that provide new features. While initially, the maximum length of a video was 10 seconds, it has been gradually increased to 1 minute, then 3 minutes,

and the latest update allows for 10-minute videos. Additional features, such as the ability to change the speed of a TikTok clip or to move back and forth to a specific timestamp in a clip, offer a viewing experience similar to that of YouTube. This leads to the emergence of YouTuber-like TikTokers, creators who produce videos in which they speak directly to the audience. Their fan communities are starting to resemble those on YouTube as a direct consequence of viewers spending more time watching particular creators with whom they potentially form emotional connections (Vancottem 2021, 12). In addition, these communities retain certain TikTok characteristics, such as the ability to create easily a video response to a creator.

As an example of a TikTok vlogger, I have chosen Calum Harper, as he perfectly exemplifies YouTuber-like creators. Calum is a British model who documents his daily life. His first post dates back to December 2021, and, at the time, his TikToks were entirely lip-sync-style videos. He started talking in his videos in the summer of 2022, which led to an exponential increase in his view count. Now, he almost exclusively posts vlogs. At present, Calum has 2.2 million followers and 84.7 million total likes. The comment sections of his videos reveal a sense of unity and mutual understanding between his fans, as they have collectively decided on several phrases to transform into inside jokes. The most popular is "yep yep yep", a saying he uses frequently and has started being recognised as his catchphrase. Other phrases, however, result from viewers agreeing en masse on certain moments being funny. Whenever shopping is mentioned in a video, the comments feature the phrase "straight into my baaasket," referencing a moment of Calum's mundane life while selecting items in a grocery store. Similarly, if America is referenced, the comments will contain different spellings of the word 'ranch', alluding to his unusual pronunciation of the term in a vlog visiting American supermarket Target on seeing the product on the shelves.

Another YouTube-like feature which has started to emerge on TikTok is the creation of montages dedicated to a particular creator. Instead of FMV, on TikTok they are called edits, and they feature clips merged together, with an additional song in the background. In the case of Calum, his edits are

mostly created using clips of his career as a model. The most popular one (posted by @ed5v) currently has 3.5 million views and 872 thousand likes. It is a compilation of videos of Calum walking on the runway, featuring upbeat music. The comments section shows people sharing the creator's enthusiasm and appreciation for Calum. While some use his catchphrase "yep yep yep", many others post words of encouragement, which creates an overall sense of unity and agreement.

Conclusions

In conclusion, both YouTube and TikTok contain communities centred on or driven by content creators. Active members of these communities can communicate with other users or even respond directly to creators on their respective platforms through comments, and even creating their own content. The latter, especially, is dictated by how each platform is constructed.

In the case of YouTube, this article explored how the platform fosters a deep and lasting connection between creators and their fans. These connections go beyond mere viewership; they evolve into tightly knit pseudo-families where fans not only consume content, but actively participate in shaping the community's norms and values. The comments section, while serving as a direct channel for fans to communicate with their favourite creators, is also a vital space for specific fan exchanges, symbols, and memorable moments. To illustrate this, the article examined the fandom surrounding British YouTubers Dan Howell and Phil Lester, a community that has evolved over the past 14 years. Their collaborative content has generated a dedicated fan base, exemplifying the strong emotional bonds that form on YouTube. Moreover, the fan-generated content on YouTube, including compilations and fan-made music videos, plays a pivotal role in fan interactions and community building. Fans participate by creating content that not only celebrates their favourite creators, but also encourages discussion and connection. This participatory approach

helps maintain the sense of belonging that is the hallmark of such online communities.

TikTok, on the other hand, is a platform where rapidly evolving trends and user interactions redefine fan experience. Unlike YouTube, TikTok communities are less centred around individual creators and more focused on content and trends driven by the platform's algorithmic recommendation system. The platform's unique features, such as duets and stitches, enable users to actively engage with content creatively, and go beyond the traditional comments. As TikTok continues to evolve, we noted a shift towards content that resembles traditional vlogging, with creators using the platform to connect more directly with their audience. The introduction of longer video formats and interactive features enhances the sense of connection and shared experiences. TikTok's participatory culture encourages users to interpret and transform trends creatively, blurring the lines between creators and fans. A prominent example, Calum Harper, demonstrates how TikTok creators can transition from lip-sync videos to vlogs, drawing viewers into more creator-focused communities. His catchphrases and inside jokes create a sense of unity and shared identity among his followers.

Overall, the analysis emphasises that the essence of online fandom —the creation of a sense of belonging among like-minded individuals — remains a constant in interactions on social media sites. Nevertheless, each platform's unique characteristics play a pivotal role in defining the nature of these communities. YouTube offers deep emotional connections between creators and fans, while TikTok thrives on dynamic trends and participatory culture. Both platforms serve as fertile grounds for diverse fan communities, showcasing the multifaceted nature of online fandoms in today's digital landscape. As the digital era continues to evolve, these platforms will adapt. However, the essence of fandom, the sense of belonging, and fans' passion will persist, connecting individuals across the virtual world.

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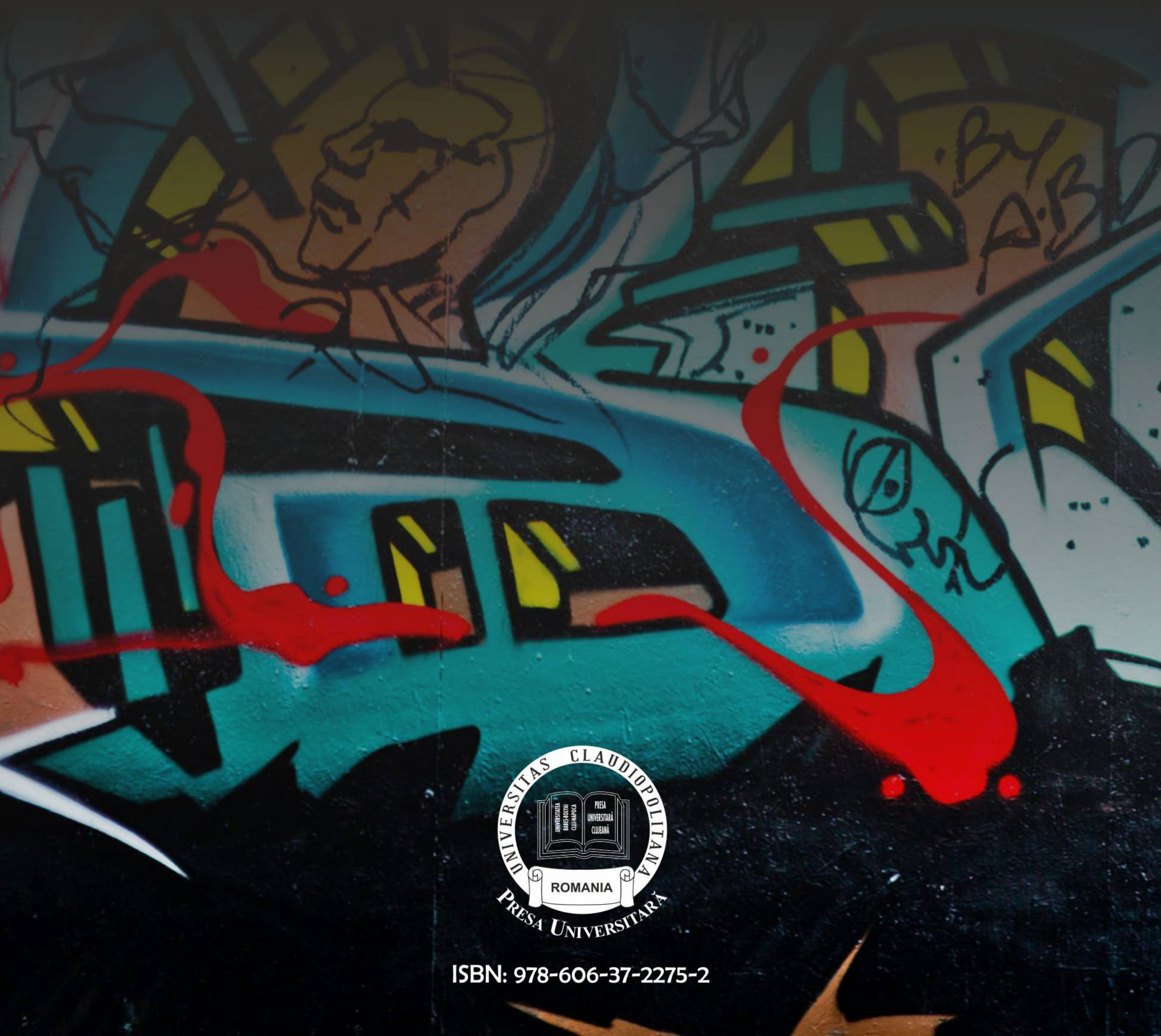
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ISBN: 978-606-37-2275-2